

BRITAIN'S BEST PC GAMES MAG PCZONE.CO.UK

PCZONE

ISSUE 214 CHRISTMAS 2009

World Exclusive!

NAPOLEON

TOTAL WAR

"I CAN NO LONGER OBEY; I HAVE TASTED COMMAND,
AND I CANNOT GIVE IT UP" NAPOLEON BONAPARTE



CHRISTMAS 2009



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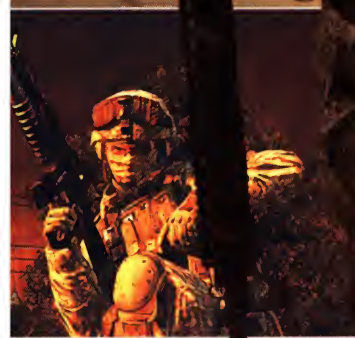
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describes people who
are short in stature?



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WARFARE 2



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PCZONE

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In this issue of the UK's
best PC mag...

THE CURSED ISSUE

THE EXCLUSIVE COVERS just keep on rolling in at ZONE Towers. This month is no exception as we got the chance to visit Creative Assembly for a first look at *Napoleon: Total War*! But it hasn't been plain sailing this month; in fact this month's mag has been dubbed 'The Cursed Issue', as everything that could've gone wrong, did.

First, David got signed off work for the foreseeable until his back gets better. Along with being sorely missed, it's bad timing considering all the content we have this month: reviews for *FM10*, *CM10* and the cover feature (we know how much he loves *Total War*; remember the *Empire* review?). Thankfully Martin Korda gallantly stepped into his shoes, excited that he'd be the first to see the game in action. But days before the trip to CA he fell sick. Luckily Log was on hand to replace him and the cover was saved!

While all this was happening, I went on a trip to Sweden, just for one night, and my flight was delayed... by five hours! Four of which we were on the aeroplane. That's never happened to me before, and I certainly don't want to repeat the experience. By the time we arrived at the hotel night, we had just 20 hours in Stockholm.

So, it's a miracle this issue is even in your hands, but with an extra 16 pages, it's bigger and better than ever.

Next month, I've got two words for you (well a word and a number):

BioShock 2. Yikes!

Ali Wood

Ali Wood
Editor
ali.wood@futurenet.com

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COVER STORY

NAPOLEON: TOTAL WAR

The diminutive dictator appears for the first time in the *Total War* series. Find out what the Frenchie is bringing to table



46 THE 10 SCARIEST GAMES OF ALL TIME

Get ready for chills aplenty as we run down the games that make you piddle your knickers.



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And get Norton
AntiVirus Gaming
Edition! See page 52



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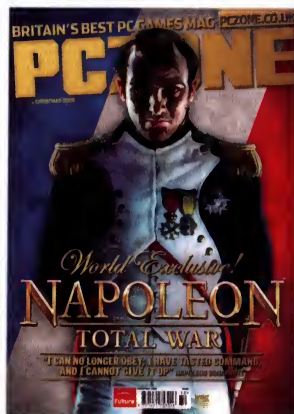
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WHAT'S ON THE COVER?



60 NAPOLEON: TOTAL WAR

Too busy? PC ZONE in 72 words...

This month we were under huge pressure because writing machine David was ill, but we're still bringing you in-depth previews of *Empire: Total War* and *Modern Warfare 2*'s multiplayer modes, and *Napoleon* – the spin-off from *Empire: Total War*; terrifying you with the scariest games of all time; and starting a long love affair with *Dragon Age: Origins*. And now, we're going to David's home and dragging him out of his sick bed.



110 FREEWARE

Become a dildo salesman, run around in sci-fi armor, avoid monsters in the dark, and help out a moose.



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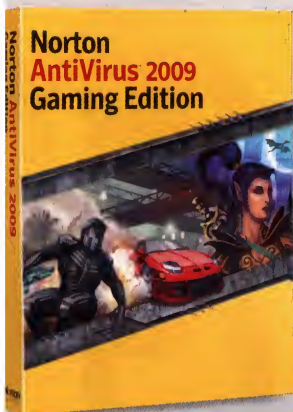
DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS

This year's epic RPG from BioWare has landed. Will it match up with our great expectations?



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Closing date: 4 December, 2009.
Full offer details on page 52.

Meet The Team

Here are the ones to thank for **PC ZONE**



STEVE HILL

MMOer and poker stud

AGE Bloody ancient

LIKES Bluffing and royal flushes

DISLIKES Waking before 3pm

FANCIES A drink

FAVOURITE GAME Countdown

NOW PLAYING

Need For Speed: Shift

This month sees the comeback of Steve Hill and *NeverQuest*. On his return Hill regaled us with stories of his life as an online professional poker player "HillyTheFish". As ever with Hill, the *PC ZONE* team took the easy way out: we nodded, patted him on the head, and sent him on his way with a pile of football games to review, as well as instructions to play *Champions Online* and write wittily about his time playing it. As soon as he left we all swore never to play cards with him again.



ALI WOOD

Editor

Convinced that a minor diety has taken offense at *PC ZONE*, Ali called in a priests to exorcise the magazine. But the calisthenics seemed to have little effect.

NOW PLAYING: *Resident Evil 5*



STEVE HOGARTY

Deputy Editor

In David's absence, Steve has been doing the work of two. But this didn't stop him sending David regular Get Well cards. By bricks.

NOW PLAYING:

Red Faction: Guerilla



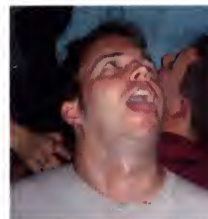
MARCO FIORI

Freelance fat saver

A promotion from occasional slave labour to paid in-office worker, made Steve and David nervous.

Is Marco going to replace one of them? Of course not. Well, not yet...

NOW PLAYING: *Junior PR Exec*



WILL PORTER

Freelancer and dwarf fetishist

Mr Porter got into trouble with his better half by conducting liaisons with dwarf prostitutes. Claiming *PCZ* made him do it was not accepted as an excuse.

NOW PLAYING: *Dragon Age*



JON 'LOG' BYTH

Freelancer

This month a plague of illness and injuries struck down *PC ZONE* writers. But brave Log laughed in the face of the curse, and stepped into fill the gaps in the magazine.

NOW PLAYING: *Mini Ninjas*



ADAM GLICK

Freelancer

This month we found a small helicopter hovering outside *PCZ*'s windows. Attached was a packet labelled: "Glick's work". Why can't he email it in like everyone else?

NOW PLAYING: *Arkham Asylum*

WHAT'S HELPED THIS MONTH... Lots of games being delivered, extra pages, and Marco.

WHAT HASN'T HELPED THIS MONTH... Continuing spinal disc herniations and MRI scans not being booked in.

WHAT WE'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT...

BATMAN: RHYTHM ACTION **3mins** Dear God, they didn't really think that'd be good?

IT'S DIRECTX 11 **13mins** We think we know why lots of PC games are being delayed.

YOU WERE DOING WHAT? **2mins** Will's been up to stranger stuff than usual.

THE TORIES **4mins** Face it: they're going to win.

IT'S OVER **12mins** The Festival season has closed. The team packed away their tents for another year.

CRUEL PARENTS **5mins** A Swedish mum and dad named their kid "Q" after the *Star Trek* character.

PARANOTA **2mins** Richard had to convince his neighbours scaffolding around his flat wasn't a complicated effort by burglars.

IT WAS JUST A FILM! **7mins** There's an International Church of Jediism. Does this mean George Lucas is the Messiah?

WHY, DAVID WHY? **4mins** Bowie's in *Rock Band*, as a LEGO character? We thought he was above this kind of thing.

CALL OF DUTY: THE MOVIE **7min** Rumours of a *Call of Duty* movie get us excited. So long as Uwe Boll doesn't touch it.

WIN!



HOW TO ENTER TINY COMPO: For your chance to win text TINY followed by your answer, name and email address to 87446 or post your answer, name, post address and phone number to Tiny Compo, PC ZONE, Future Publishing, 2 Balcombe Street, London, NW1 6NW. The winner will be picked at random from all correct entries received and will receive a copy of *Batman: Arkham Asylum*. The winner will be notified within 28 days of the closing date. Texts will be charged at 50p plus your normal network tariff. By entering this competition, you consent to us using your personal details to send you information about products and services which may be of interest to you. If you do not want to receive this, include the word "STOP" at the end of your text or postal entry.

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"Allods Online has the potential to offer something really exciting in a genre that struggles to innovate"

(Videogamer.com, August 2009)

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Letters

Ali Wood is thankful she doesn't rely on Royal Mail for correspondence



KING OF LETTERS

SECONDHAND FUN

Yet again there seems to have been a real dearth of quality games appearing over the summer. The only newly released game I bought was *ArmA II*, and ironically if there was one game that needed its release date put back to iron out bugs, that's it. But far from being a negative thing, this drought has actually been what Americans call "a teachable moment" for me.

With so few new games being released I've been looking for old releases that passed me by, and I'll be damned if there aren't some fantastic treasures to be found. I'm avidly playing the excellent *Jade Empire*, have made deep inroads into *The Witcher* and am enjoying *UFO: AfterShock*. I missed these games when they came out and to rediscover them now is a tremendous thing.

Games that are a year or two old hold up pretty well in terms of graphics, and the prices are usually less than £10 making them great



value, too. But don't buy secondhand: support the developer whenever possibly by them buying new. They're still cheap.

But never buy anything on *Steam*. The prices are so high that you come away feeling like you've been and sodomised with a plunger.

Daniel Polwarth

It's also worth checking out sites like Good Old Games (gog.com). I find many of the games there are the same price as on *Steam*, so I'm not sure your claim about overcharging is true. However, it was refreshing to hear of someone making the most of times when there's not many new games released.

GIMME BATTLEFIELD

Why are all the new *Battlefield* releases on Xbox and the PlayStation 3? It all started with PC, why not keep it like that? *Battlefield Heroes* was meant to come out when *Bad Company* did but no,

it was delayed. And now *Battlefield 1943*, a remake of the first *Battlefield* has been released on Xbox and PS3 first!

I say they go back to making the good ones with "You are basically dead. Wait 15 seconds before you die or get revived to just be killed by the guy aiming at your leg". Anyway that's my opinion make a new *Battlefield* on the PC I want deflابلaters back! And now to end with the childish angry face >:(
Adam Swystun

Adam, are you a little bit annoyed?

The good news is, *Battlefield: Bad Company 2* is coming out on PC on 5 March, at the same time as those pesky consoles.

As for *Battlefield 1943*, I contacted EA, and here is the official line: "We are not yet confirming any release date for 1943 on PC. However it will be 2010." To which we say: balls.

GHOSTBUSTERS BUST?

I finally got my hands on *Ghostbusters* but after installing it, I was informed my "installation was cancelled", for no reason at all. I simply put it down to coincidence as I was doing other things at the same time, a simple restart and I tried again, still a problem; that got me thinking. A search into Google yielded 72,600 results for "Ghostbusters installation problems" and it seems the error spurs from the dodgy installer.

Anyone getting déjà-vu at this point? Seems like its *Terminator Salvations*, take two.

Eventually I found a quick fix, copying files from my C: - which I told the game not to install to, but it did anyway - to my D: - where I told it to install. Confused? I was.

Which leads me on to say the same old story that we always hear, companies wonder why people pirate



WIN!
This month the King of Letters receives an ASUS 9600GT Top graphics card. This 512MB graphics card has a pre-set 10% overclock, made possible by the ASUS-exclusive Glacier cooler fitted on it. The card also packs an HDMI socket, making it perfect for using your PC with hi-def flatscreen TVs or projectors.



A tank's exhaust backfiring is not good.

@pczone t
letters@pczone.co.uk @
letters, pc zone, future publishing, ✉
2 balcombe st, london, nw1 6nw

A proton pack that
shoots round corners?
Double cool!



"Congratulations to Namco Bandai for their second massive blunder"

their games, and they let this happen. The pirated versions of games are normally much more stable and at least work compared to the purchased versions from legitimate customers who have parted with their money.

So say congratulations to Namco Bandai for their second massive blunder. I should now think another 100,000 or so people are now pirating their games.

Ben Marks

We mainly play *Call of Duty 2*, *Modern Warfare* and *World at War* but just recently we have been struggling to find active members. We have a great website, plenty of banter and the occasional deep discussion, and two servers which are free from cheats. We have very few rules, have fun and show the utmost respect at all times.

The reason for my email it to ask if your magazine has ever thought of

running a "Who are we?" column featuring a different gaming clan each month, this way it would encourage new gamers and also help out clans like ours enormously.

Dean Jones

I'd like to do something like this but my concerns lie on whether there will be enough clans willing to participate. Do you think that most people who are in clans actually want to encourage people to join? If we get enough emails



YOUR SHOUT!
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WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR II

Tom Hindmarsh

PC ZONE SCORE 78%

Picture *Company of Heroes*. Now picture it again with all the fun and interesting features cleaved off and tossed aside and you have *Dawn of War II*.

When you take one of your most successful games and hire an elite squad of 12 year-old amateur modders to make it like *Warhammer 40,000* you end up with a game where creatures without personality stand in the open and spray pea shooters at one another's faces, until one of their life bars drops to zero and they fall over; where a cover system does almost nothing; and the only play style available is spamming.

YOUR SHOUT 61%

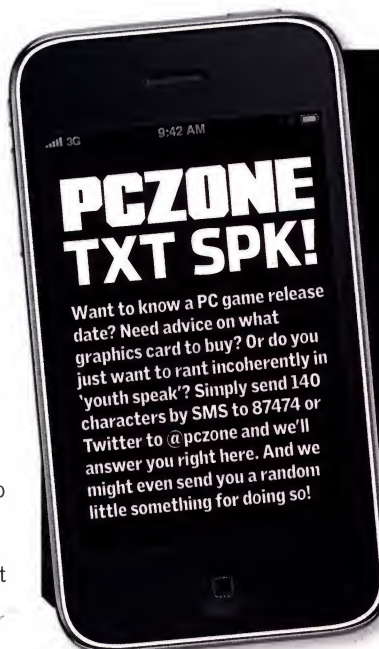


Send your reviews with a maximum of 100 words, your name and a score to letters@pczone.co.uk. Every one printed here wins a top PC game.

Sorry to be sensible, but *Ghostbusters* isn't officially out until 6 November in the UK, so you obviously know that when you import, you do so at your own risk. But when I called Namco Bandai they said if you did get in touch they would help you nonetheless. If anyone else is having problems call 0870 850 1958, which doubles up as their customer services and technical helpline.

DAD'S THE WORD

We are the DADclan from the UK. We were formed nine years ago by two new dads, who wanted a safe and respectful place to play online games. We are open to dads of all ages and put fun and sportsmanship above all.



Haz David rily bin plastered head 2 toe?
Harry P

Not quite, but he does have a pair of crutches.

85% for *Risen*?!
Stevie

Yeah. We liked it. How about a 'Your Shout'
Stevie

90% for *OpFlash2*?!
Stevie

Yeah. We quite liked that too.

napoleon was a shortarse french twat who was always fumbling with his nipple
Mike

Yeah, you tell them Frenchies!



Don't worry: this is
not really David.

Text your PC game-related nonsense to 87474, putting PCZTXT at the beginning of the message, then leave a space, and continue with your text - and don't forget your name. Texts should be no more than 160 characters long.

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Gunfights in Brazil's slums really aren't unusual.



LOST IN THE POST

LETTERS FROM OUR
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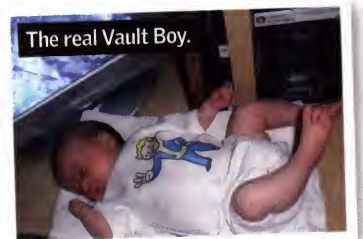


BE ORIGINAL PLEASE

Isn't it strange that the only games from Bullfrog at the moment are sequels or updates of Molyneux classics? With *Populous: The Beginning*, *Theme Park World*, and *Dungeon Keeper 2* on the way, it looks like he was the only creative talent in the entire company.

Thomas Le-Luan

Taken from over 10 years ago in issue 72 (Jan 1999) Bullfrog was swallowed up by EA in 2004, simply becoming EA UK and Peter Molyneux turned his hand to Lionhead and games such as the epics *Black & White* and *Fable*, and most recently wowing and confusing us with the *Milo* technical demo at E3, as part of Project Natal. So those creative juices are still flowing.



alien blaster toting four week-olds out there?

Max's Dad

I'm not one to print pictures of babies, weddings, etc, but this is incredibly cute! Isn't he a bit young for *F03*?

➤ following your letter being here, I'll change my mind!

In the meantime, maybe if I mention your website, people will join your clan. Head to dadclan.co.uk if you're interested dads!

SMOKE NEEDS FIRE

You usually make me laugh, but the *Battlefield: Bad Company 2 Hot Shots* (issue 213) made me angry, although only for one reason!.

One of the captions says: "Smoke is awesome, but smoking isn't. Fire is awesome too, but very dangerous, so if

"Dying in a fire is one of my worst fears, but you're overreacting"

you can try to get smoke without fire, it's definitely for the best."

Is the person that wrote this aware of the dangers of smoke? The average adult can take three breaths before passing out, then they get burned to death. Remember kids: get a carbon monoxide detector, and if you're unsure about it all (including fire alarms,) contact the fire brigade, they're more than likely be happy to help.

Rob

Dying in a fire is one of my worst fears, but I think you're overreacting a little.

Obviously we didn't mean to make anyone angry, but most PCZ readers are in their 30s, and is it really up to us to give advice to grown-ups who really should know better?

And the game in question requires you to blow people up for God's sake. Is that not dangerous?

WARFARE DELAYED?

There is a strong rumour, and suspicion going in the PC gaming community in America and beyond that *Modern Warfare 2* for the PC is going to be delayed till after the Xbox 360 version is released on 10 November. And Infinity

Ward are not denying it, owing to their almost total silence on the matter.

Infinity Ward have grudgingly stated that development work on the PC version has only just started, and we are just over six weeks till the release deadline. Plus all the hype and marketing up to now has been exclusively for the Xbox 360 in a massive sales and promo funded by Microsoft, to plus the Xbox owing to falling Xbox sales last year.

So if any PC ZONE readers are waiting to get their hands on the game on 10 November, they may well be in for a disappointment.

Mr C Edmondson

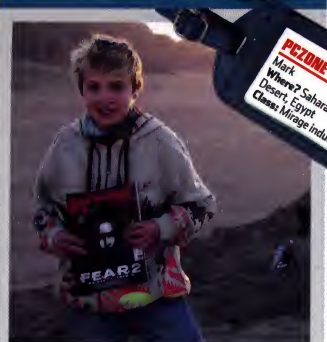
From your initial prediction the rumours escalated, but we still don't know what's happening. And Activision aren't talking.

I'm inclined to side with you Mr C on this one, as 24 November is where the smart people are putting their money. I hope this means we can still bring you the review in the next issue.

FALLOUT BABY

Max often sneaks out of his cot to play *Fallout 3*. In the photo he fell asleep after an all-night *F03* bender. Are there any other maxed out stats, level 30,

PCZONE AROUND THE WORLD



We want photos of you with PC ZONE in the most exotic or inappropriate locations. Candid celeb shots count double. Every one printed wins a prize!

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IN STORES 06.11.09*

FROM THE MAKERS OF BALDUR'S GATE™

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COVER STORY

NAPOLEON: TOTAL WAR

How did Europe become terrified of one diminutive Frenchman? This game will explain all...





CREATIVE ASSEMBLY HAVE got a lot going on at the moment. As well as the sterling after-sales service that goes into their patches – the latest bringing campaign multiplayer to *Empire* (page 36) – we've got *Empire*'s first expansion – *The Warpath Campaign* – which gives the honest Injuns a bigger slice of the story pie, and a chance to dominate post-revolution America. But standing above it all is the 5'2" behemoth that is Napoleon Bonaparte – a man whose military strategy, gigantic ego and celebrated downfall led to the naming of a train station that serves Shepperton and Twickenham. Who could ask for a more immortal legacy?

PAGE

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**PCZONE**

UPFRONT

Everything that matters in the **world of PC gaming**

BAD FEELINGS

LET'S GO ON a World Adventure to Sweden!" said EA. "OK!" I said. I'd never been to Stockholm and, along with spending the night in the Abba hotel (very cool and not a pair of sequined flares in sight) I was going to be the first to try out *The Sims 3: World Adventures*. You know how much I love *The Sims*, so I jumped at the chance.

At Heathrow I was ready for the two-hour flight. But then they had to switch planes. This gave me a bad feeling. When I got on the new plane, taxiing to the runway took forever. This gave me a bad feeling.

Then the pilot spoke: "We have found a fault on the plane. We are calling the engineers to see if it can be fixed." Three and a half hours after sitting on the tarmac and the diagnosis was in: the plane was broken. So we had to get off, go back into the airport, through security again and wait for a new plane to be prepared. Five hours after my original flight was due to take off, all I could look forward to was a flying visit. Was this was EA's idea of a world adventure?

But I needn't have worried. The next day, after a spin around the old town, I headed back to the hotel where the *World Adventures* event was taking place, and you can read the interview opposite. I for one am very much looking to writing the review next month.

Ali Wood

Ali Wood
Editor

ali.wood@futurenet.com

THE SIMS 3: WORLD ADVENTURES

There's a surprise in store for the first *Sims 3* expansion pack as *Ali Wood* finds out

DEVELOPER EA SF PUBLISHER EA WEBSITE ea.com/games/sims3-world-adventures ETA 20 Nov

THANK HEAVENS FOR *The Sims 3*'s Store. As this hub will sell clothing, hairstyles and furniture, we'll no longer be subjected to naff expansion packs. Instead, EA are saying that add-ons for *The Sims 3* will explore new directions in gameplay.

The first will be *World Adventures*, and we found out a bit more about it from EA's Azure Bowie (no relation).

Q Why did you pick France, Egypt and China as settings for the first *World Adventures*?

A We were looking for locations which were different from each other. In Egypt you do things like explore

tombs, while in China you learn martial arts, and in France you make wine.

Where would your ideal world adventure take place?

Egypt is my favourite location! There are things in Egypt your sims can do that you'd never be able to do yourself: going into tombs and being this Indiana Jones character. That's really exciting to me.

Do you get into trouble for taking relics from tombs?

No – the guided adventures are never bad. Sometimes you'll be working for a corporation, but you'll really be working towards saving and protecting the artifacts you find.

Are there any countries that you wouldn't pick. Say, Afghanistan?

We try to be as culturally sensitive as possible. Egypt is a Muslim country, so we wanted show Egypt in a true light, while also being very aware that there are sensitive things around there. But, as always in all *Sims* games, we have no religious imagery of any kind.

So there won't be any topless sunbathing then?

No, not in our game.

The 'quest and choice' gameplay is a brave move for *The Sims*. Is this the way further expansion packs will go?

We're taking *World Adventures* where our expansion packs have never been before. The thinking was, "What can we offer that's different and new, and more exciting than anything we've done?" And going to real-world locations is something that players have always said that they wanted. They love anything that they can add in that brings them a closer to things they can do in real life.

One major push of *The Sims 3* is to play it nice or nasty. Is it possible to do that in *World Adventures* as well?

Always! I play more deviously with my sims, so there are things in *World Adventures* like being cursed by a mummy. If your sim's cursed they'll have just 14 days to find out how they're going to release the curse, otherwise they'll die.



"Players want be able to make *The Sims* like their own life"

STOP PRESS!**A SHAME FOR SHABA**

Activision have closed *Spider-Man: Web Of Shadows* dev Shaba Games. They hadn't made a game since *Web* in 2008. Could that be why it's now shut?

CHINA CRACKDOWN

China has banned 45 online games it said promote drug trafficking and prostitution. Looks like China won't get any smugglers and pimps MMOs then.

MAKE A HERO

BioWare have released a character creator for *Dragon: Age Origins*. This lets you create your protagonist before the game's launch. Cool, but we really wanted a demo instead.

34

MODERN WARFARE 2

Hands-on with the multiplayer side of the awaited FPS.



46

FRIGHT NIGHT

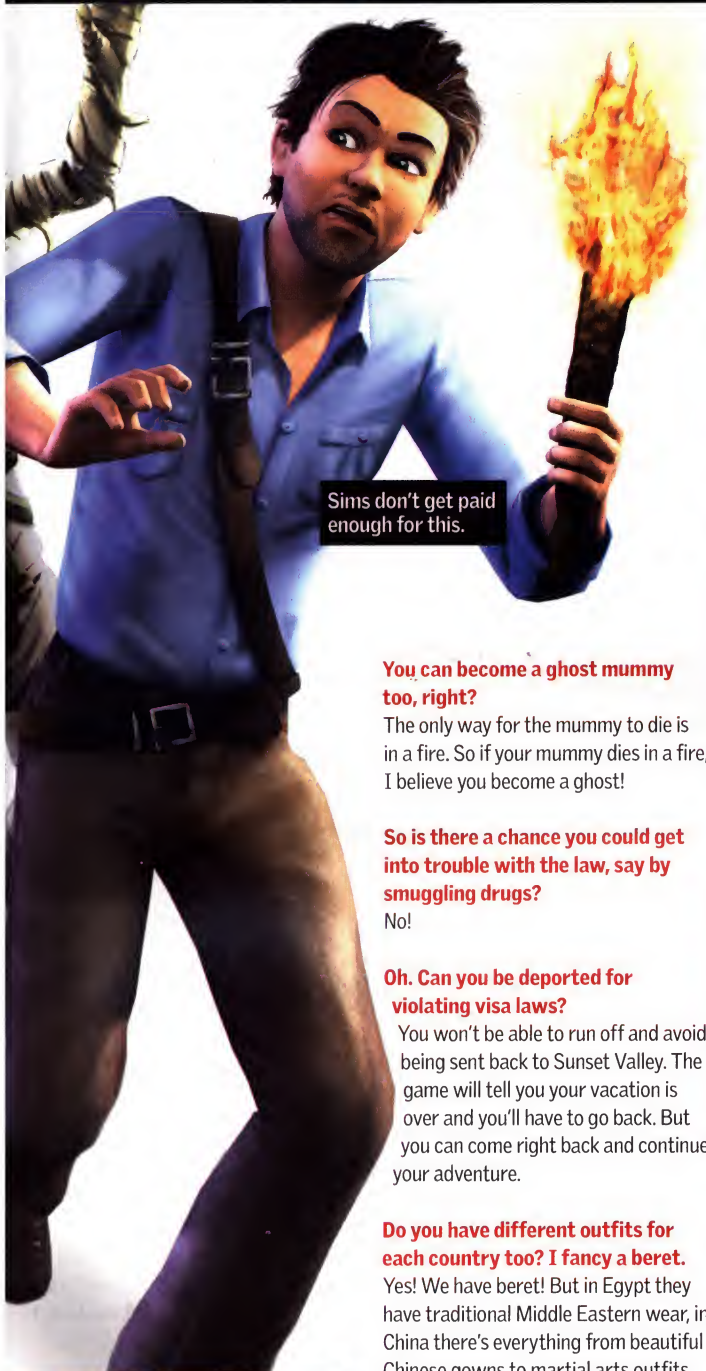
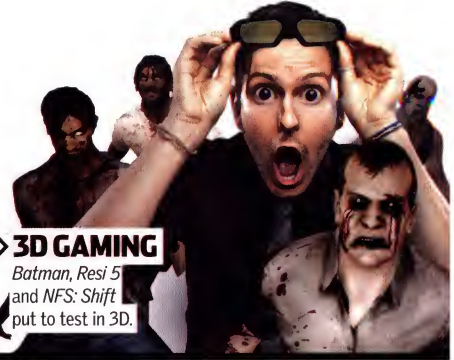
Prepare to be scared with our top 10 spooky games.



54

3D GAMING

Batman, Resi 5 and NFS: Shift put to test in 3D.



Sims don't get paid enough for this.

You can become a ghost mummy too, right?

The only way for the mummy to die is in a fire. So if your mummy dies in a fire, I believe you become a ghost!

So is there a chance you could get into trouble with the law, say by smuggling drugs?

No!

Oh. Can you be deported for violating visa laws?

You won't be able to run off and avoid being sent back to Sunset Valley. The game will tell you your vacation is over and you'll have to go back. But you can come right back and continue your adventure.

Do you have different outfits for each country too? I fancy a beret.

Yes! We have beret! But in Egypt they have traditional Middle Eastern wear, in China there's everything from beautiful Chinese gowns to martial arts outfits, and in France they fashionable new outfits. And there'll be some new shoes!

What are our chances of us seeing a British expansion pack?

That sounds like a neat idea. One of the things players want is to be able to make *The Sims* like their own life. So some fans will create custom content that looks exactly like their home or a pub down the street. But your idea is definitely an interesting one. **PCZ**



Don't worry, this won't end badly.



Great kick. A few feet short, but a great kick.



Oh, fireworks!

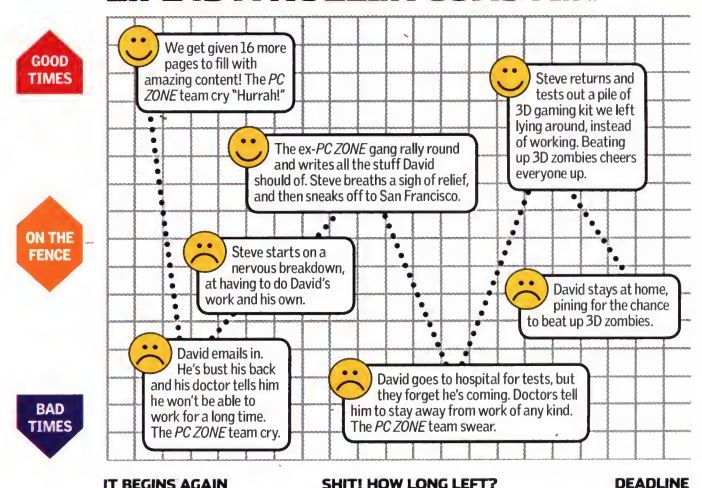


You don't mess with this sim...

STUFF

While Charlie Brooker's one-off BBC4 show *Gameswipe* scooped over 300,000 viewers, the channel has said it has no immediate plans to increase its focus on videogames, despite heavy praise for *Micro Men* – the battle between Clive Sinclair and Chris Curry for the '80s' home computer market. "Games are unlikely to be a regular feature of BBC4 but we'll almost certainly return to the subject at some point," said a spokesperson. However, Brooker has admitted *Gameswipe* got more viewers than *Newsnight* and *Screenwipe*. And one 50-minute show simply wasn't long enough.

LIFE IS A ROLLER COASTER



ALL THAT GLITTERS

Money, money, money, is so funny in an online world, finds *Pavel Barter*



FOR MILLIONS OF MMO players, there was no love lost. In fact, last July's widespread report, that the Chinese government had banned gold farming, was met with giddy rapture.

For years, gold farmers had been the worker ants in games like *World of Warcraft* and *EverQuest*, trading virtual loot for real-world profit. Gamers harrumphed, publishers shook their fists, but where there is demand there is always supply and gold farmers continued to sell MMO swag for profit. An estimated 85% of these entrepreneurs operate in China. So, upon hearing the news, many MMO denizens breathed a sigh of relief. Gold farming was dead. Or was it?

Not at all, says the University of Manchester's Professor Richard Heeks, an expert on virtual economies. "The reason the

Chinese government hasn't banned gold farming is because it doesn't want to ban gold farming. It wanted to clamp down on the use of online payment systems as alternative currencies to the Yuan. We have to wait and see if its policy statements become policy reality. But gold farming continues."

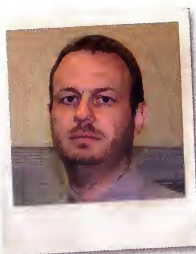
CASH HARVEST

Gold farming remains an economic phenomenon. Around a million farmers work in China alone, generating \$1 billion every year. Across the Far East, workers hunch over PCs, repeating tasks to win items or loot, then sell their spoils to customers. An AT-RT in *Star Wars Galaxies*, for example, nets a gold farmer around £6. In *RuneScape*, 5 million gold shifts for £12. Other gold farmers power-level characters for customers: in *WOW*, you can pay £30 to have a level 40 character dinged to 60.

For his upcoming documentary, *Play Money* (playmoneyfilm.com), Anthony Gilmore visited gold farming operations across China. One business, located in

Changsha, has more than 300 employees and plans to increase its workforce to 500. Gilmore also visited a power-leveling firm in Nanjing and a smaller family run studio in Beijing. According to myth, gold farmers work in sweatshops: the kind of hellholes where Third World toddlers knit Gucci handbags. This is not really the case.

"As this industry has grown over the years, the working conditions have improved," says Gilmore. "For the most part, comparative to similar service industry jobs, the workshops offer



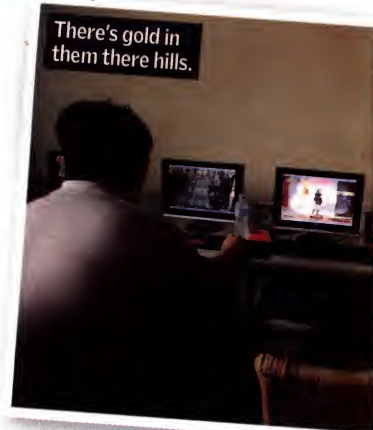
"The Chinese government hasn't banned gold farming because it doesn't want to ban gold farming"

Richard Heeks, Uni. of Manchester

decent salaries, often with bonuses, and the work is safe. There is no need to worry about getting a hand caught in a sewing machine. Smaller workshops generally house workers on the premises. Some may also offer between one and three meals per day. The larger the company the more standard work conditions you find.

"Many gold farmers are pleased with their work because of job security, good salary, and friendly environment. The majority of power-levelers love their work because they get paid to play videogames. These workers are gamers first and foremost, just like the customers they support."

Gold farming is just an Eastern business. In its heyday, IGE (Internet Gaming Entertainment, www.ige.com) made millions from trading virtual swag, and it still shifts gold from MMOs like *Age of Conan* and *Warhammer Online*.



There's gold in them there hills.

Alongside offices in China, IGE operates out of Los Angeles and Miami. "IGE's employees and service providers earn above average pay, work in clean, air-conditioned facilities, and receive benefits including gym sponsorships, transportation and other allowances, medical plans, annual bonuses, to deliver high employee morale and productivity," says IGE's Raoul Blautzik.

AGE-OLD PROBLEM

Gold farmers have had plenty of time to hone their craft. Players first began selling items for money in the late '80s. In 1997, the joint launch of eBay and



Any witch way but loose.

sniff-sniff "Hmmm... I smell a gold farmer."



Beijing power-levelers on a break from MMO work.



Underachieving gold farmers are sent to the naughty chair.



The Shopping Channel's new presenter is a real charmer.

Ultima Online turned it into a proper commercial prospect, although publishers were unnerved. Blizzard deleted accounts, took legal action, and banned non-US IP addresses from its US servers (farmers dodged this by using proxy servers). Other developers were more creative. In *Final Fantasy XI*, Square Enix unleashed goblin bounty hunters on gold diggers.

Some policing attempts backfired, however. In 2007, Jagex introduced anti-bot measures into *RuneScape*, but these damaged the gameplay.

"It really hurt us at the time but it was the right thing to do – which is why our community continues to grow while others are slowly dying or dead," says Jagex's Adam Tuckwell. "RWT [Real World Trading] undermines the integrity of the game and whilst a few players will always want to buy their way to success, the vast majority will, resent the two-tier community where

money triumphs over hard work. They quit and move onto another game."

Certainly, many MMO players loathe the activity. John Bain, who runs fan site *WOW Radio* (wcradio.com) believes gold farming causes in-game inflation, pricing new players out of the market. "In addition, gold farmers annoy players via spam, advertising their services and sites with in-game mail, chat channels, and direct messages," says Bain. "Gold farmers also monopolise mobs within certain areas of the game, making questing difficult for levelling players."

Gold-selling companies have been known to break into accounts, stealing items and gold, says Bain, which has led to player vigilante groups. "Myself and several others actively hunted gold farming bots a few years back and suspected bots are kill-on-sight for most veteran players. The ultimate aim of a vigilante is to force the bot to log-

DIGGING FOR GOLD

The warning signs

LACK OF SOCIAL SKILLS

"One of the first giveaways is that they aren't very social," says Erling Ellingsen from Funcom, creators of *Age of Conan*. "They tend to not respond when spoken to, and unless it serves their needs they don't play much with others. They're completely focused on their monetary goals. They also have a tendency to be greedy, and lack understanding and respect towards people in their group."



BODY FARMS

Check out the dead body URLs laid out in the main square of Stormwind City in *World of Warcraft*. Gold farmers spread out the stiffies to spell out URL links to gold-selling sites.



A TOUCH OF OCD

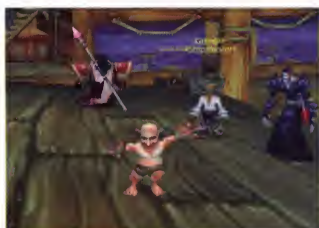
Look out for the signs of repetitive behaviour: mining ore, killing gremlins, chopping wood, etc.

"A single farming character will rarely be operated by a human being," says John Bain from *WOW Radio* (wcradio.com). "It's more likely that several characters will use botting scripts to automatically farm gold, while a minder watches out for any issues, such as a character getting stuck or attacked by other players."



NOT DRESSED TO IMPRESS

World of Warcraft gold farmers aren't arsed about their appearance. "They often have inferior gear, almost all of which will be Bind on Equip, since they do not level via questing and running," says Bain. Furthermore, their names are often lazy gobbledygook – "Xjiveoughf", or whatever – with a pet cat called "Cat" or a boar named "Boar".



off or, ideally, get into a situation such as drowning, falling off a cliff or getting stuck in terrain. Bot scripts don't deal well with tricky terrain and have almost no concept of 3D movement."

NO SOLUTION

Despite attempts to rid the online world of gold farming, the activity continues. Heeks does not buy the argument that RWT creates in-game inflation, saying their effect on the virtual economy is marginal compared to the behaviour of regular players. And although it has lost the millionaire-making status it had a few years ago, it remains viable and profitable work. "Publishers should find a way to work with gold farmers instead of fighting them," says Heeks. "My favourite suggestion, though sadly just a joke, was that the game companies should rehabilitate gold farmers by employing them as NPCs."

For his part, filmmaker Anthony Gilmore believes gold farming is an inevitable presence in virtual economies. "The largest companies that serve as the middle man – or gold brokerage – employ more workers than Blizzard," he says. "They have access to networks of tens of thousands of workers in the gold farms, from where they acquire in-game currencies. This isn't just a casual trend industry, it is every bit as organised as any other. As long as there is a demand for their services, they will always exist." **PCZ**

Is there anything you want **PC ZONE** to investigate? (Warning: some jobs might be considered too big or too small...)

@ letters@pczone.co.uk
 ✉ Special Report, **PC-ZONE**,
 2 Balcombe St, London, NW1 6NW

Photos © Nameless Films, Andrew Watson.

PCZONE Charts

Official data compiled by
GfK ChartTrack

- 1 **NEW** **AION**
Issue 214 - 80%
- 2 **↓** **THE SIMS 3**
Issue 208 - 92%
- 3 **NEW** **CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 2010**
Issue 214 - 80%
- 4 **NEW** **FIFA 10**
Issue 214 - 66%
- 5 **↓** **WORLD OF WARCRAFT: WRATH OF LICH KING**
Issue 202 - 86%
- 6 **↓** **EMPIRE: TOTAL WAR**
Issue 206 - 78%
- 7 **NEW** **BLOOD BOWL**
Issue 213 - 71%
- 8 **NEW** **RISEN**
Issue 214 - 85%
- 9 **NEW** **NEED FOR SPEED: SHIFT**
Issue 214 - 84%
- 10 **NEW** **BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM**
Issue 214 - 89%
- 11 **↓** **WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR II**
Issue 205 - 78%
- 12 **↓** **GRAND THEFT AUTO IV**
Issue 203 - 91%
- 13 **↓** **FALLOUT 3**
Issue 201 - 91%
- 14 **NEW** **RESIDENT EVIL 5**
Issue 214 - 85%
- 15 **↑** **COMPANY OF HEROES: ANTHOLOGY**
N/A
- 16 **↓** **WOLFENSTEIN**
Issue 213 - 69%
- 17 **↓** **SPORE**
Issue 199 - 95%
- 18 **↓** **FOOTBALL MANAGER 2009**
Issue 202 - 90%
- 19 **NEW** **WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR COMPLETE**
N/A
- 20 **↓** **COMMAND & CONQUER: RED ALERT 3**
Issue 201 - 86%



1. AION

So all a game has to do is look pretty and have people with wings to be a hit? You people are shallow.



4. FIFA 10

The console version of this arcade footie game may be better than PES, but it's a bit pants on the PC.



3. CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 2010

An animated version of *Excel* to everyone but to soccer anoraks.



7. BLOOD BOWL

American football sports with a bit of a *Warhammer* twist. A pretty good game, if you can dedicate the time to it.

TOR NO MORE

The Old Republic goes AWOL

WEBSITE swtor.com/user/register

LUCASARTS RECENTLY SET up a sign-up page for the closed beta tests of its new MMO *Star Wars: The Old Republic*, and, surprise surprise, within seconds of going live, it failed spectacularly due to galactic traffic issues.

The site is up again and if you're keen to participate you can try your luck using the above link. No test dates have been confirmed yet and places are described by LucasArts as being "limited". Once you sign up, getting an invite looks down to being pot luck.



A visual metaphor of swtor.com's plight.

CASH 4 SPEECH

Voice actors to get more money

WEBSITE sag.org, aftra.com

LUVVIES AT THE Screen Actors Guild (SAG) and the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (AFTRA) have struck a new wage agreement with videogame companies.

The deal which runs until March, 2011 delivers a 3% wage increase for SAG members, offering parity with the previously higher-earning AFTRA crowd. On top of this both unions will receive a further 2.5% increase in April 2010.

The deal also bumps up pension and health benefits and a \$100 liquidated damages provision to encourage employers to give notice of "vocally stressful" work.

The contract also establishes a new category of performance for "atmospheric voices" allowing companies to record multiple minor character voices in a single session.

Yes, it really is that bureaucratic when it comes to getting those squeals, grunts and groans into your PC. You had no idea did you?



"I got a pay rise. About bloody time!"



Truck. Snow. Ice.
Huge fuel drum.
This means trouble.

"If that's not insane enough, you can pick from over 30 lethal load types"

10-4 EXTREME RUBBER DUCK

18 Wheels go wild in the country

WEBSITE scssoft.com

IF YOU EVER wanted to experience that sinking feeling of watching a 60-ton trailer slide agonizingly beneath the freezing water of a Canadian arctic river, you're in luck.

18 Wheels of Steel: Extreme Trucker powers its way across three terrain types: the aforementioned Tuktoyaktuk Winter Road in Canada, the Australian

outback, and the perilous mountain route of Bolivia's Yungas Road (aka the Road of Death).

Wannabe truckers can squeeze into the cab of more than 25 different rigs, including hauling double, triple and quadruple trailers. And if that's not insane enough, you can pick from over 30 potentially lethal load types

including logs, flammable gas, and bridge supports.

Full details haven't been revealed yet but it's likely *18 Wheels of Steel: Extreme Trucker* will follow a similar single road path as its predecessors *Pedal to the Metal* and *Across America*. However, there's scope for some off-road action or even an open-ended

approach where the player plans their journey based on weather, traffic reports and terrain. If SCS Software is reading this, and you haven't included that feature, then make sure it happens soon. Please. Just for us.

*18 Wheels of Steel: Extreme Trucker*s will be hauling itself onto your PC in time for Christmas.



That's a road train. The longest one had 113 trailers!



Tractors? That's not extreme.



Excuse me, your bikes are floating.

Incoming

All dates are correct at time of press!

WELCOME TO THE new and expanded *Incoming* section. Previously tucked away on our *Buyer's Guide* pages, we felt it was only right to give up and coming releases more space and share the information we have tucked away in our tiny minds. So each month we'll list as many games as we can fit, with updates on a selection of games. Also,

the exciting graph at the bottom charts the anticipation for the releases due over the next few months.

With the amount of slippage at the moment, we've plenty to talk about over coming months, but that doesn't stop us being severely disappointed. Still, at least it will keep us busy at the start of 2010, when it's too dark to leave the house!

MODERN WARFARE 2

Infinity Ward's community manager, Robert Bowling has cleared up the name change. "It is *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2*, but you'll never see that in game. We never call it that. It's because we think of this as a new series. This is our *Modern Warfare 2* game." Although at time of writing it was also

rumoured the PC game would be released two weeks after the console versions. Grrr.



RACE ON

The two-circuit, two-car demo is out now and, while this game has sneaked under our radar, it's worth a look. From motorsports experts SimBin – developers of *GTR Evolution* (PCZ 200, 80%) and *Race 07* (PCZ 187, 79%) – this is the official game of the world's two biggest touring car events: WTCC

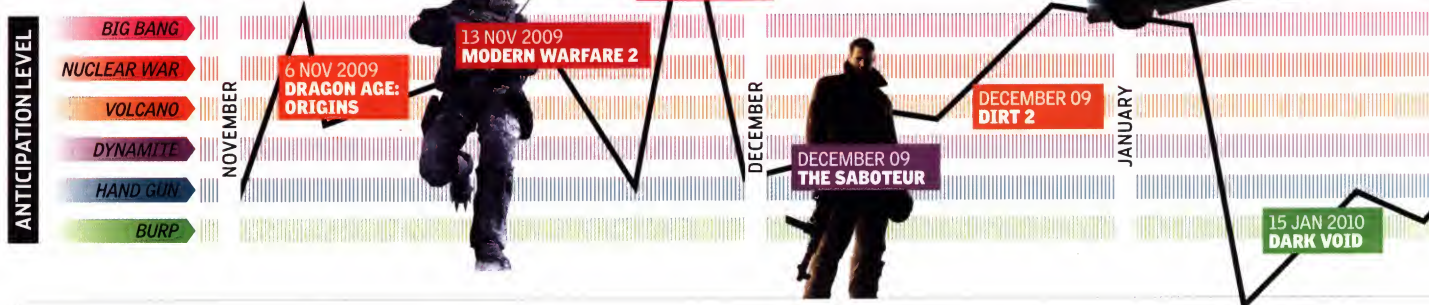
(Fia World Touring Car Challenge) and STCC (Swedish Touring Car Challenge).



GAME	PUBLISHER	ETA
BORDERLANDS	2K GAMES	30 OCTOBER
CSI: DEADLY INTENT	UBISOFT	30 OCTOBER
FOOTBALL MANAGER 2010	SEGA	30 OCTOBER
DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS	EA	6 NOVEMBER
LEGO INDIANA JONES 2: THE ADVENTURE CONTINUES	LUCASARTS	6 NOVEMBER
TROPICO 3	KALYPSO	6 NOVEMBER
MODERN WARFARE 2	ACTIVISION	10 NOVEMBER
RACE ON	KALYPSO	13 NOVEMBER
LEFT 4 DEAD 2	VALVE	17 NOVEMBER
THE SIMS 3: WORLD ADVENTURES	EA	20 NOVEMBER
ALLODS	GPOTATO	NOVEMBER
ROGUE WARRIOR	BETHESDA	NOVEMBER
THE SABOTEUR	EA	4 DECEMBER
COLIN MCRAE: DIRT 2	CODEMASTERS	DECEMBER
JAMES CAMERON'S AVATAR	UBISOFT	DECEMBER
PLANET 51	SEGA	DECEMBER
VANCOUVER 2010	SEGA	DECEMBER
DARK VOID	CAPCOM	15 JANUARY
HISTORY ENGINEERING AN EMPIRE: EGYPT	SLITHERINE	5 FEBRUARY
BIOSHOCK 2	2K GAMES	9 FEBRUARY

AHEAD OF THE GAME TIMELINE

Take heed readers – this chart shows how excited we are over the biggest games that are coming out of the next 12 months.



THE WHISPERED WORLD	DEEP SILVER	12 FEBRUARY
HISTORY GREAT BATTLES: MEDIEVAL	SLITHERINE	19 FEBRUARY
SHIP SIMULATOR EXTREMES	PARADOX	19 FEBRUARY
SPLINTER CELL CONVICTION	UBISOFT	23 FEBRUARY
ALIENS VS PREDATOR	SEGA	FEBRUARY
NAPOLEON: TOTAL WAR	SEGA	FEBRUARY
JUST CAUSE 2	EIDOS	FEBRUARY
M.U.D. TV	KALYPSO	FEBRUARY
BATTLEFIELD: BAD COMPANY 2	EA	5 MARCH
MOUNT&BLADE: WARBAND	PARADOX	19 MARCH
ALL POINTS BULLETIN	EA	MARCH
POLE POSITION 2010	KALYPSO	APRIL
DARK STAR ONE	KALYPSO	APRIL
VICTORIA 2	PARADOX	18 JUNE
ALPHA PROTOCOL	SEGA	SPRING 2010
ASSASSIN'S CREED II	UBISOFT	SPRING 2010
BLUR	ACTIVISION	SPRING 2010
BRINK	BETHESDA	SPRING 2010
COMMAND & CONQUER 4: TIBERIAN TWILIGHT	EA	SPRING 2010
DOGFIGHTER	KALYPSO	SPRING 2010
FINAL FANTASY XIV	SQUARE ENIX	SPRING 2010
THE FIRST TEMPLAR	KALYPSO	SPRING 2010
I AM ALIVE	UBISOFT	SPRING 2010
JUMPGATE EVOLUTION	CODIES ONLINE	SPRING 2010
JUST CAUSE 2	EIDOS	SPRING 2010
MAFIA II	2K GAMES	SPRING 2010
MASS EFFECT 2	EA	SPRING 2010
MAX PAYNE 3	ROCKSTAR	SPRING 2010
R.U.S.E.	UBISOFT	SPRING 2010
SINGULARITY	ACTIVISION	SPRING 2010
SPLIT/SECOND	DISNEY	SPRING 2010
STARCRRAFT II: WINGS OF LIBERTY	BLIZZARD	SPRING 2010
TWO WORLDS TWO	SOUTHPEAK	SPRING 2010
THE SECRET WORLD	FUNCOM	SUMMER 2010
BBC BATTLEFIELD ACADEMY	SLITHERINE	WINTER 2010

SPLINTER CELL CONVICTION

Uh oh. Ubisoft has been evangelising on the strengths of its relationship with Microsoft.

Could this be a sign the 360 version will get all the loving? "I want to make sure that when the game hits the shelves the disc will 'meld' with your Xbox 360 – it's meant for the Xbox 360 and it will show," said producer, Alexandre Parizeau. Read our preview on page 42 to see how it's shaping up.



ASSASSIN'S CREED II

Here's a sad, familiar tale: *Assassin's Creed II* has seen its PC version delayed. Not the

console versions, just the PC one. A short statement from Ubisoft (issued over Twitter) says the delay is to provide: "A bit more time for the dev team to deliver the best quality game to you." Considering the problems with the PC release of the original *Assassin's Creed*, maybe this is a good thing.



THE AGENCY	SOE	2010
ALIENS: COLONIAL MARINES	SEGA	2010
CRYSIS 2	EA	2010
DAWN OF WAR II: CHAOSTHEORY	THQ	2010
DEUS EX 3	EIDOS	2010
DIABLO III	BLIZZARD	2010
DUNGEONS	KALYPSO	2010
F1	CODEMASTERS	2010
FALLOUT: NEW VEGAS	BETHESDA	2010
HOMEFRONT	THQ	2010
METAL GEAR SOLID: RISING	KONAMI	2010
PATRICIAN IV	KALYPSO	2010
PRISON BREAK	DEEP SILVER	2010



JON 'LOG' BLYTH...

AN EXERCISE IN**TERROR!**

Fear is a part of us all. If you were to make a colour wheel of survival emotions, terror is up there with fundamentals such as "the desire to be liked, especially by people we hate – just so we win at being liked". Not to

mention "the need to believe that everyone with more material possessions than me must be desperately unhappy in some way that isn't immediately obvious".

But on your average day – in Kennington, at least – there's just nothing that's genuinely terrifying. Thrill seekers might choose a right-wing newspaper, in an attempt to bewilder themselves into a state of constant social panic. But believing the world is full of knife-wielding carcinogenic immigrants isn't terror. Actually getting leapt on by an ululating, knife-wielding carcinogenic immigrant is terror. And it never bloody happens.

Basically, I'd like – just once – to find a velociraptor next to the Magnums in the freezer. I'd like to survive a car crash, just to find myself hauled from the wreck by a 70ft demon and crushed in its fist. As a dogged slave to reality, however, all I've got is drugs, movies and videogames. And because this is a games magazine, here's some ideas about how to make games more scary.

1. CAM HERE

Webcams fulfil two roles: they're how we keep in touch with family members who've moved to America, and they allow us to masturbate into an eye-filled void. Like when Shaggy and Scooby run into a closet, only when one of them lights a match, a man with his trousers around his ankles blows it out.

So, anyone playing a game with a webcam plugged in should have a constant stream sent to a group of viewers, who comment disparagingly on your appearance and actions. Imagine how much more intimidating SHODAN would've been, if, instead of going on about me being an insect, she'd said: "You're a fat ginger prick who shouldn't play games topless."

2. USE THE PC

There's a lot of personal information about you on your computer. Why don't games use it? A truly scary game should use your browser and stored passwords to access all of your social networking sites, and map pictures of your Facebook friends onto the corpses.

Creatures should come lumbering towards you, whispering your own tweets about having a cup of coffee in a sarcastic voice. And for a thrilling conclusion, if you don't take the final boss out with a single headshot, he uses your credit card and address book to buy a stack of illegal pornography, have it gift-wrapped and sent to your mum. Chilling!

If you want to enter into a debate with this professional opinion stater, you can contact Log by the methods below.

@ letters@pczone.co.uk

✉ Mr Log, PC ZONE, 2 Balcombe St, London, NW1 6NW



"Actually getting leapt on by an ululating, knife-wielding carcinogenic immigrant is terror. And it never bloody happens"

3. BREAK ALL FOUR WALLS

Developers: charge £10,000,000 for your game. When someone buys it, use the money to retire and dedicate your life to the psychopathic destruction of your customer. Demolish your customer's house, kidnap him and keep him in a well, train his own dog to attack him, and hunt him down the streets of his youth on a horse made of smoke. And the best thing for the developer is they get a nice new skin suit at the end.

4. AGONISING CONSEQUENCES

You can buy a vest that simulates the feeling of getting shot. The same company makes a helmet that taps you on the head with a plastic hammer. This is supposed to realistically reproduce the sensation of having your skull compromised by a bullet, your brain stirred to soup, and an explosive exit wound shattering your palate and removing a few teeth.

If you're that dedicated to gaming reality, then you're defective in every important way – but why stop there? Slam a girder into your kneecaps every time you fall a distance. And push slivers of glass into your tear ducts whenever you melee through a window.

The day will come when we all spend every moment of our lives in nerve-shearing panic. Until then, it looks like we'll just have to make do with lank-haired little girls who clamber onto us before a disappointing boss battle. Ho hum. **PCZ**

Cyberpower recommends Windows Vista™ Home Premium

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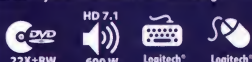
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PCZONE

READER AWARDS

2009

It's back! Welcome to the *PC ZONE* Reader Awards 2009! How has the year been shaping up for you? Which is the best game you've played? And what are you most looking forward to? Have your say here!

THE WORLD-FAMOUS *PC ZONE* Reader Awards are back! You, the world's most discerning PC gaming audience will choose the best games of the year, give a gong to the Best Developer, and also mark out 2010's Most Wanted game.

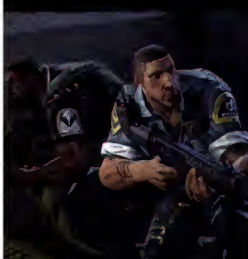
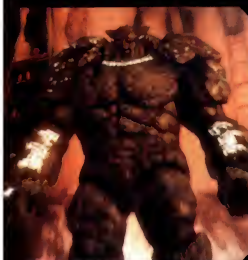
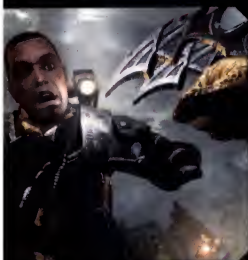
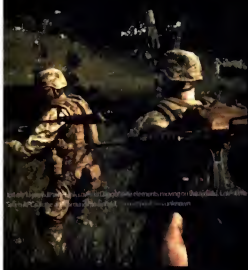
With coverage across print, online and on social networks, as well as a live launch event, the *PC ZONE* Reader Awards 2009 will be a great opportunity for you, our beloved readers, to get your opinions on paper.

We've listed the categories on the right and next to them a few suggestions, although we know you'll voice your own opinions.

There are two easy ways to vote: fill in and cut out the handy form on this page and send it back to the address below, or simply send in an email to letters@pczone.co.uk with your nominations. (Remember to put Awards 2009 in the subject header, and to specify which category each game you vote for belongs in.)

The only rules are that the games had to have been released between 9 December 2008 and 10 December 2009, and the Most Wanted game needs to be out after 9 December 2009. Votes need to be in no later than 11 December, 2009.

The winners will be announced in the March issue, which'll be on sale 20 January, 2010.



THE CATEGORIES

Suggestions – not nominations – you could vote for

BEST FPS

› Left 4 Dead 2 › ArmA II

BEST ACTION/ADVENTURE

› GTA4 › Batman: Arkham Asylum
› The Secret of Monkey Island

BEST RPG

› Fallout 3 › Dragon Age: Origins

BEST SIM

› The Sims 3 › Tropico 3

BEST SPORT

› Football Manager Live › Football Manager 2010
› Championship Manager 2010

BEST STRATEGY

› Empire: Total War › Order of War › Dawn of War II

BEST MMO

› Aion › Champions Online

BEST DRIVING/RACING

› NFS: Shift › Colin McRae: DiRT 2 › Race On

BEST INDIE GAME

› World of Goo › Time Gentlemen, Please!

BEST DEVELOPER

› Valve › Creative Assembly › Rocksteady
› Blizzard › Codemasters

GAME OF THE YEAR

› Empire: Total War › Batman: Arkham Asylum
› Dragon Age: Origins

MOST WANTED

› AvP › StarCraft II › BioShock 2 › Napoleon:
Total War › C&C4 › Star Wars: The Old Republic

AWARDS VOTING FORM



BEST FPS
BEST ACTION/ADVENTURE
BEST RPG
BEST SIM
BEST SPORT
BEST STRATEGY
BEST MMO
BEST DRIVING/RACING
BEST INDIE GAME
BEST DEVELOPER
GAME OF THE YEAR
MOST WANTED

YOUR DETAILS

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DAVE GROSSMAN
DESIGN DIRECTOR, TELLTALE GAMES

MONKEYS AND PIRATES

Digging up pirate gold with *Steve Hogarty*



DAVE GROSSMAN, ALONG with Ron Gilbert and Tim Schafer, brought us *The Secret of Monkey Island* and its sequel *LeChuck's Revenge*. As an original pioneer and now key player in the newly invigorated adventure genre, he holds a special place in our hearts. We sent Steve Hogarty to the captain's cabin for parlay.

Q Point 'n' click games had been abandoned on a desert island. Why have they returned?

A There are various reasons why they went away. First, they're hard to do well: screw it up just a little bit and the whole thing is unappealing.

The gaming audience at the time was also young and interested in adrenaline, and the business climate was about getting your game on the shelves in a very limited retail space. The big blockbusters with the biggest

budgets competed for that space and it was hard to get a publisher backing anything else. Now online

distribution levels that playing field to some degree.

You can make a game, get it out there and reach the customer directly. It makes a lot more sense again and publishers are starting to realise that, so there's a nicer business climate.

Can the genre evolve to appeal to a modern audience?

It's true that the audience is different now: they're much older, they have kids, they have other things to do in their lives. They don't want to spend five hours bashing their head against the wall trying to solve one puzzle.

We've evolved systems behind the scenes that push the player through the



"If you want to keep a series alive you have to change things around"

game whilst paying attention to their progress. Our system detects a player's lack of progress and drops hints.

There's also more focus on the story, characters, drama and set-pieces so it's less a game and more of an attractive story. That's where the major success of adventure games in the future is going to be.

What do you think of indie titles like *Time Gentlemen, Please!* from *Zombie Cow Studios*?

I haven't got round to *Time Gentlemen, Please!* But I've played *Ben There, Dan That!* I loved it. In fact, Mark Derren, who designed *Tales of Monkey Island Episode 3* was hired from the indie development crowd. He wrote some film noir titles called *A Case of the Crabs* and *The Goat in the Grey Fedora*.

There are some great character and plot ideas out there right now.





Do you think tools like *Adventure Game Studio* are helping?

Jean Cocteau said "film will only become an art when its materials are as inexpensive as pencil and paper". That's what it feels like to me: it's an enabling tool where anybody with a good idea can put together a game without much technical knowledge – which is great.

How many episodes make up the *Tales of Monkey Island* series, and are they all planned out by the time the first one ships?

There are five episodes. The entire series involves a couple of months worth of planning and modelling the central cast.

Then we think about the overall story arc and how each episode fits together: the major dramatic points; what questions we'll leave hanging between episodes and which ones we're going to wrap up.

Then we start end-designing the specifics of the first episode and we'll pound out the story and the puzzles for it. When we write the script for the first one we'll start design on the second. When we're writing the script for the second, we're designing the third and so on. Ideally that's the way the process works.

Right now we're about to release the third episode and we're wrapping up the design on the finale and the fourth script is midway through.

Do you ever get an 11th hour situation where you find a puzzle doesn't work?

We play test fairly late because the process is pretty quick and we need to be sure we've got all the final content.

We usually hit that point a few weeks before release and that's when we can tell if a puzzle isn't reading well, or if people can't see objects, or can't figure out what to do.

Then we move cameras to highlight objects or maybe add dialogue. Sometimes if a puzzle still doesn't work we'll rework or cut it.

When referencing older *Monkey Island* games how do you keep existing fans happy, without alienating the new ones?

We try to put in references that are funny if you've played the previous games but also if you haven't. As it turns out that's not too hard.

Do you reference *LeChuck's Revenge* where, rather controversially, it was



revealed that the entire game was a child's dream?

No, we ignore it! That was certainly controversial. Some people liked that ending and others really didn't.

Were there similar levels of fan angst when LeChuck became an ally?

So far people are buying into this and they're interested in this side of him.

If you want to keep a series alive you have to change things around and explore new avenues. That's what we're trying to do and people seem to appreciate it.

Was it a relief to get Dominic Armato, the original voice for Guybrush Threepwood back?

When *Curse of Monkey Island* came out there was this outcry as soon as they heard the voice of Threepwood: "No! No! I was expecting something completely different!" because, of course, everyone was imagining something different from everyone else.

I thought Dominic sounded great and now it's impossible to think of Guybrush Threepwood without imagining Dom in your head. **PCZ**



LeChuck, is now your friend!

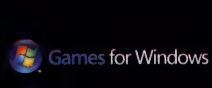
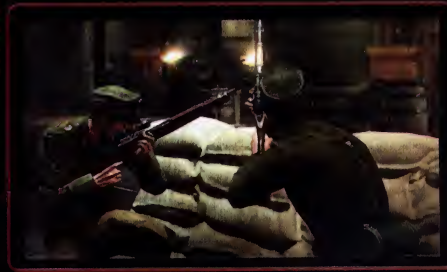


"THE GODFATHER OF FIRST-PERSON SHOOTERS RETURNS"

XBOX 360 THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE

Wolfenstein™

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ETA
TBC
2010**GRRR...**

RAGE

Steve Hogarty is dragged into the sun by id's blue-sky shooter

DEVELOPER id PUBLISHER id WEBSITE rage-game.com
PREVIOUSLY IN... 186

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Looks genuinely beautiful
- ✓ It's outdoors!
- ✓ Customisable vehicles
- ✓ Build unique tools with schematics
- ✗ Wok-hats are odd

THE WORLD IS a post-apocalyptic dustbowl populated by mutants, and proud retro-fitted scavengers with fast, growling cars, deadly makeshift crossbows and upturned woks for hats. You, the unwitting outsider, emerging prematurely from your armageddon-proof panic room finds you're somehow better at surviving in this hostile environment than those who'd been living in it their whole lives. It seems eerily familiar, especially if you've ever played a *Fallout* game or seen *Mad Max*.

What's so special about *RAGE* then, besides it being id's first original game in a decade? Well it looks really nice – id's Tech 5 engine is a technological marvel, and *RAGE*'s world beams with pin-sharp detail and objects, with solitary wooden shacks to towering wind-carved columns of rock, all looking meticulously hand-crafted.

The lighting is incredible too, with the evening sun beating the contours of the cliff face, roasting the scarce flora and glaring off rusted metal, while the shade glows with an ambient, cool blue hue. id have managed to not only

"Mel? Is that you?"



to fill the world with light and shadow, but there's a real sense of temperature in the cleverly employed palette of browns and blues.

IT'S A BEAUT

Our presentation starts in this beautifully composed landscape, with the demo's controller flicking through his available weapons. He flings a batarang-style blade-weapon, which cuts through the air before returning to him, he plays with a flimsy pistol, before taking out a crossbow and looking through the scope a few times.

A room of journalists busily scribble down notes while the presentation rolls onwards, we're now in a buggy, bombing towards the settlement of Wellspring through sandy canyons. Bandits pile in from all-directions, drawn by the roar of your engine, try to ram you into dunes. You retaliate with a few rounds from your on-board weapons, and they flip and spin through the air, peppering the sand with shards of debris. The billowing dust kicked up by the spinning tyres is thick, parting and curling as your car blows through. The explosions are chunky, solid things – fiery bursts of bright orange in the desert.

That 20-second vehicle battle is perhaps the most visually impressive game sequence I've seen rendered in real time, bar none.

Once we arrive at Wellspring, the splendour continues. As a newcomer, guards are wary of you, and entering a bar affords you little welcome. Side missions are available here, as well as a primary quest from the town's mayor, who wants you to sabotage a nearby bandit hideout.

This leads you back into id's comfort-zone, an indoor shoot-them-in-the-face sort of affair, albeit one more sophisticated than *Dooms* of past – the crossbow allows for stealth kills, and bodies can be looted for machine parts, which (assuming you've got the correct schematic) can then be used to cobble together useful items.

You'll be able to change outfits, and have terrible haircuts.

THE STORY SO FAR... RAGE



MIFFED

1897: the first time that anger caused a dick to be punched.

1817



ANGRY

In the '30s Poles were livid about being invaded by Nazis.

1939



PISSED

Americans discover 'pissed' refers to getting drunk. Idiots.

1992



RAGE

Rage should be out by Christmas. We'll all be very cross if it slips.

2010



Bandits will periodically attack you while driving.

APOPHIS

RAGE's brand of post-apocalyptic isn't the aftermath of a nuclear war for a change, but the aftermath of a huge meteor falling from space and obliterated everything on the world. The world's brightest were placed into cans underground called Arks, and you emerge early to find that the Arks have been utterly forgotten about by the survivors.

Apophis, the rock that breaks the planet in RAGE, is a real thing. It currently boasts a 2.7% chance of smacking into us in 2029. But there's a greater chance that it'll enter a "gravitational keyhole", setting us up for a collision on 13 April 2036.

If it's any consolation, that'll be a Sunday, so there'll be very little on TV.



Mutants enjoy sunlight.

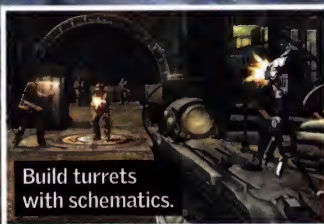
The remote-controlled bomb car, for instance, is what you'll use to complete this particular mission. Compiling the required items allows you to create one on the spot, and once deployed you control it through its on-board camera, guiding it down ducts and crawlspaces to a previously inaccessible room full of explosives.

We're shown another buildable object, the sentry bot. Essentially a gun with robotic spider-legs, it follows you about, obediently murdering those it deems unworthy of your presence.

A CAR FOR LIFE

Back out of the bandit base, you'll scoot quest-in-hand back to Wellspring in your vehicle, which can be stored at Mike's Garage. Here you'll be able to purchase new vehicles, as well as upgrade your current ones with better suspension, increased armour, extra boost, grippier tyres, or just a fresh coat of paint. The point is that your ride is persistent, and you'll be trying hard not to have it turned into a smouldering roll cage.

Nearby, Slim offers race challenges, which take place in bespoke arena



Build turrets with schematics.



Mutants enjoy dim lighting.

tracks in the desert, while a grotesquely obese chap called Styles forces you (at first, at least) to take part in his violent, voyeuristic *Running Man*-style TV show, *Bash TV*. Blast deranged, clown-mask wearing mutants in the face for cash (each death elicits a satisfying cha-ching sound) in the Chamber of Laughs in exchange for race sponsorship, and once your obligations have been met you can return at any time, much in the



Bash TV is the RAGE equivalent of *Oblivion's* arena. A slaughter-fest.

same style as *Oblivion's* arena, for a financial pick-me-up.

So much is still under wraps, and we're still uncertain about the exact scale of RAGE (beyond a vague promise of around 15 hours of gameplay) and how its open-world will be delivered.

The driving locations we were shown (which can be walked across, if you've got the patience) are wide areas walled visibly on either side by cliff faces, with various routes leading to settlements and other locations. This

isn't an *Elder Scrolls*-degree of wanderability then, but then that's not the direction id are taking RAGE in – they're firmly pegging it as an action shooter, not a racer, and certainly not an RPG.

Whatever side of the genre-blend this particular coin lands on, id are daring to take their talent outdoors. An ambitious project from the PC's most legendary developer, we defy you to be anything other than gut-wrenchingly excited. **PCZ**

"An action shooter, not a racer, and certainly not an RPG"

**DECEIT IS RIFE...**

R.U.S.E.

War turns *Steve Hogarty* into a lying gitDEVELOPER Eugen Systems PUBLISHER Ubisoft WEBSITE ruse.uk.ubi.com**ETA
SPRING
2010**

GENERALS ARE SHIFTY buggers. Hitler, for example, would often call up Churchill and claim to have sent 4,000 Maus tanks to Newcastle. Winston would hop on the train to go up and have a look, leaving Number 10 undefended. Such deception is a key element of war, as established by Sun Tzu in *The Art of War* – a book now read exclusively by advertising bumholes.

Why such a crucial tactic has been under-represented in RTS games is baffling, and *R.U.S.E.*'s titular feints are what sets it apart in the staid World War II strategy genre. That and its unique presentation. It's laid out in front of you as a tabletop board game, to the extent that you can see the edges of the table and the slick, glossy chips used to represent units. Zoom in and the chips fade into animated troops and armour, and scale to their surroundings. The

ceiling becomes a sky, and the game becomes reality.

Build bases, position anti-air turrets in forests, plant some airfields and factories and start pumping out your offensive and defensive forces. The idea is to control different regions, and your ruses, the tools of your deception, act on these provinces. The radio silence ruse conceals the movements of every unit in that area, the camouflage net conceals buildings, Blitz doubles unit movement speeds.

LIAR, LIAR

Known enemy locations (radar does most of this, while air and ground units can scout ahead) are marked with red silhouettes. But both armies can fake advances – your foe might send some red silhouetted tanks to your eastern front, causing you to move your own forces to defend. On your arrival the

enemy forces will vanish, having never existed. Meanwhile, the actual armoured brigade will begin to appear on your now undefended western border. That's a textbook ruse right there.

Deception is the idea then, and *R.U.S.E.* deceives even further by appearing mildly more complex than it is. These are straightforward units, and the game abides by straightforward rules. *R.U.S.E.* is even, put down your tea for this, playable on a gamepad. *R.U.S.E.* is less about fiddly micromanagement and more about selecting, pointing and moving. Which is fine by us, as it means we might actually stand a chance when we take the game online. Or perhaps we're only deceiving ourselves. **PET**



THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Ruses are newswes
- ✓ Simple rules
- ✓ But complex battles
- ✓ Cleverly presented
- ✗ Enough long-term appeal?

THE STORY SO FAR... EUGEN SYSTEMS

CIVILISATION

The first signs of habitation are found in where Paris will be.

4200 BC

FOUNDED

Eugen Systems is born in Paris. Nobody says it's a weird name.

2000 AD

DIRECT ACTION
Act of War: Direct Action comes out. That should sound familiar.

2005 AD

HIGH TREASON

Act of War: High Treason comes out. But no-one cared.

2006 AD



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ETA
**24 NOV
2009****DEATH REWARDS...**

MODERN WARFARE 2

Jon Blyth goes paddling in online excellence

DEVELOPER Infinity Ward PUBLISHER Activision

WEBSITE modernwarfare2.infinityward.com PREVIOUSLY IN... issue 209

THERE ARE A number of points in your life when you realise you're doing something wrong. Getting your arse consistently handed to you playing an online multiplayer FPS is the one that springs to mind, having recently attended the Modern Warfare 2 event in Los Angeles.

A more stinging example is when you decide to have a sensible night's sleep to avoid the more obnoxious symptoms of jetlag: and the first person you meet in the morning says, "I went to a strip club last night – \$25 and she let me smack her arse!" The look of unparalleled joy on his face, and the fact I wasn't even jealous, left me feeling like I was missing out on what it means to be alive.

Anyway, back on track. *Call of Duty* might have flown the PC coop and built gigantic, billion-dollar nests on the consoles, but while Sony and Microsoft wage the war of special edition consoles and timed exclusives, let's just be glad

that Infinity Ward are committed to PC development, and let's never talk of *Call of Duty 3* again.

So far, we've had a glimpse of *MW2*'s single-player campaign, and the Special Ops co-op mode has been showcased briefly. Today, though, it's all about the PvP multiplayer side – with three new maps cycling on the 32 machines. Favela is your dusty shanty town, with tight maze-like roads occasionally opening up into areas filled with burnt-out cars and fizzing pylons. Then there's the dusty expanses of Afghan, with mountainous brown terrain and bunkers providing hiding places and sniping spots. Finally there's High Rise, which breaks with the dusty theme and lets you wage war around an office block and on roof-tops.

KILLING POINTS

The multiplayer side of *Modern Warfare* was characterised by two things: progress and prestige. In terms of progress, the kill streak awards were instant reward for persistent murder, and the levelling and unlock system provided a compelling wider picture to keep you going. For prestige – well, you could trade all your progress for a shiny badge that proves you're awesome.

The progress has been improved: more kill streak awards, from three to at least 11 consecutive kills (11 gets you a massive gunship. How Infinity Ward can

improve on that makes is making us very excited).

Death streaks give heroic losers the chance to redeem themselves, with health boosts and the ability to steal your killer's class, to see how he was kitted out. The unlocks are constant, too. Level three grants access to all five predefined classes, and level five lets you create five custom classes.

A class load-out now consists of your unlocked primary and secondary weapon, two pieces of equipment, three

Sadly, that tracker only detects Aliens.



No glass wall is safe!



THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Smooth, slick, gorgeous
- ✓ Meatier character development
- ✓ Everything looks better
- ✓ The core excellence is intact
- ✗ Capture the Flag is new now?

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BLOCKBUSTER
GAMES

THE GUNNED-DOWN RUNDOWN

What's new, without bullet points

When there's nothing ground-breakingly new, but a lot of little tweaky improvements, it's difficult to summarise why a game's better, especially in a way that won't alienate people that haven't played the first *Modern Warfare* multiplayer. So here's a wee list of what we know. There are at least three maps – Favela, Afghan, and High Rise – and two new multiplayer modes – Capture the Flag (really, it's new – don't question it) and Demolition, which involves planting a couple of bombs.

You'll have 15 kill streaks to unlock, nine of which have been revealed, with menus implying that the being able to fire at your opponents from an AC-130 Gunship plane is only the third-best.

Meanwhile, there's a new world of customisation both useful (death streaks and secondary weapons) and cosmetic (emblems and accolades).

On top of that, there's a bucket of polish, and a gallon of spit.



Say, isn't that rocket launcher a bit overkill?



of your unlocked perks, and a death streak.

The prestige elements have also been built up. Now, you don't just get to show off with a badge that proves you've voluntarily given up your top-level soldier 10 times, like some kind of suicidal maniac.

Now you unlock emblems through a separate achievements system. This is connected to Accolades – end-of-game awards given to those with high kill-to-death ratios, or who've done good at protecting their flag.

Fight in office blocks...



...and in Brazil's shantytowns.



In the potentially intimidating world of online shooters, *MW2* tries to be friendly, offering bonuses for every notable situation. Killing someone who's nearing a kill streak or who's recently killed you or a teammate; using a variety

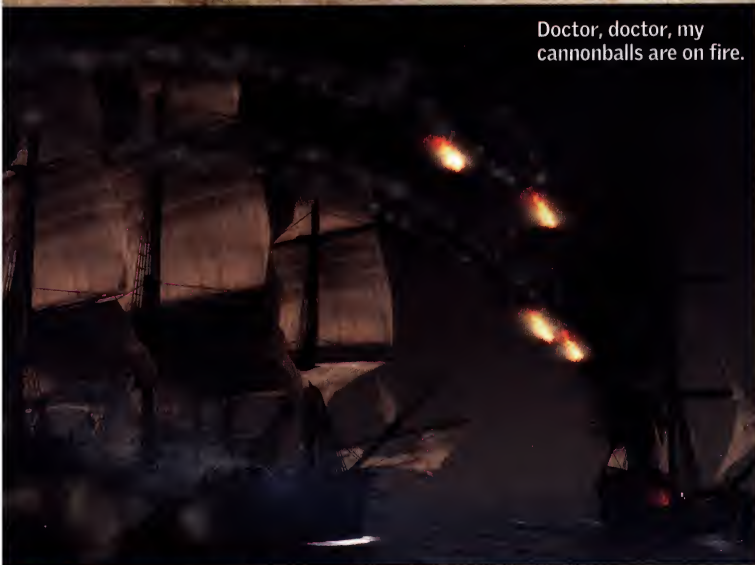
of weapons – all these things offer an XP boost and awards that can lend even the worst player a sense of dignity.

When you get that balance right, thrilling the hardcore and letting the ungifted join in, you're onto something pretty big. *Modern Warfare 2*'s multiplayer is nothing desperately innovative, but it's a completely slick and friendly experience that looks set to easily replace its predecessor in the multiplayer throne. **PCZ**

"All these things offer awards that can lend even the worst player a sense of dignity"

DON'T FIGHT YOURSELF...

EMPIRE: TOTAL WAR MULTIPLAYER

Empire's campaign map just got a bit more intenseDEVELOPER Creative Assembly PUBLISHER SEGA WEBSITE totalwar.com/empire**ETA
OUT
NOW**

Doctor, doctor, my
cannonballs are on fire.

had to ensure that the game was properly balanced to support two players and that neither has an advantage over the other." As it turns out, it's only the advances made, and changes in the underlying code, in *Empire* that have made such a play mode possible.

It's impossible for an outsider to guess the work involved in balancing an innately unbalanced world – and the more human elements added, the more confoundingly unpredictable it gets. My strategic choices are reigned in, however, with a strict time limit – two minutes. You can change this time, but it does feel perfect for the game – the pressure's always on, but there's time to tend to your settlements, armies and agents.


Having another human on the map changes the game in a fundamental way. It's like photography – your eyes are naturally drawn to the human, not the machine. So, your relationship might fail immediately if you think your opponent is the greatest challenge to your eventual rule. This could escalate into a blinkered war, while the AI looks on, baffled by your disregard for emotionless to-do lists. If it were a movie, this would be the first time the AI decides that humanity should really be wiped out.

That's not what CA are hoping for, though, as Bridgen explains: "I believe that players will be a little more cautious when dealing with human-controlled factions, that they may otherwise have been with a distant faction. Some players



The squares' attack was devastating.

may forge an alliance and work together towards a goal, even sharing tech and money. However as they become more powerful they will have to resist the urge to stab the other in the back, either directly, or indirectly by giving money and tech to their enemies."



It feels better, knowing
your actions are causing
real human anguish.

TO MANY PEOPLE – myself included – *Total War* is a solitary affair. It's a time-bath with both taps running and the plug pulled out. It's a slow wrestling match, where you fight against invisible AI routines and your own stupidity, gently prodding at new possibilities, exploring your own understanding of military strategy, and how it fits into thousands of algorithms that've been refined to best simulate how wars would probably go, if they were fun.

When *Empire* was released, CA confirmed that it was working on a multiplayer campaign. And as the *Total War* series has found an online home on *Steam*, it's only natural that you'll be able to play through the *Steam* community – or by

a LAN. Whatever Blizzard say as they herd the last straggling *Diablo* players with cattle prods onto Battle.net, playing by LAN isn't dead yet.

WHY THE WAIT

What's hard to believe is that multiplayer *Total War* hasn't been done already: all the mechanics seem to be in place. Surely, to this simpleton writer's mind, all you have to do is just let one of those other countries be controlled by a human, instead of the AI, right? Well, not quite, according to the patient explanation of Kieron Bridger, Creative Assembly's communication manager.

"The infrastructure had to be put in place in order to implement a multiplayer campaign. It's not just a case of switching out the AI with a human, we

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Fight alongside a friend
- ✓ Trade with a friend
- ✓ Covertly sabotage a friend
- ✓ Openly betray a friend
- ✗ Lose a friend



"Have you tried Marjory's lemon drizzle cake? It's to die for."

If you've got victory conditions that aren't in conflict between yourself and your allies, bully for you, but sometimes a gumdrops and rainbow ending won't be possible.

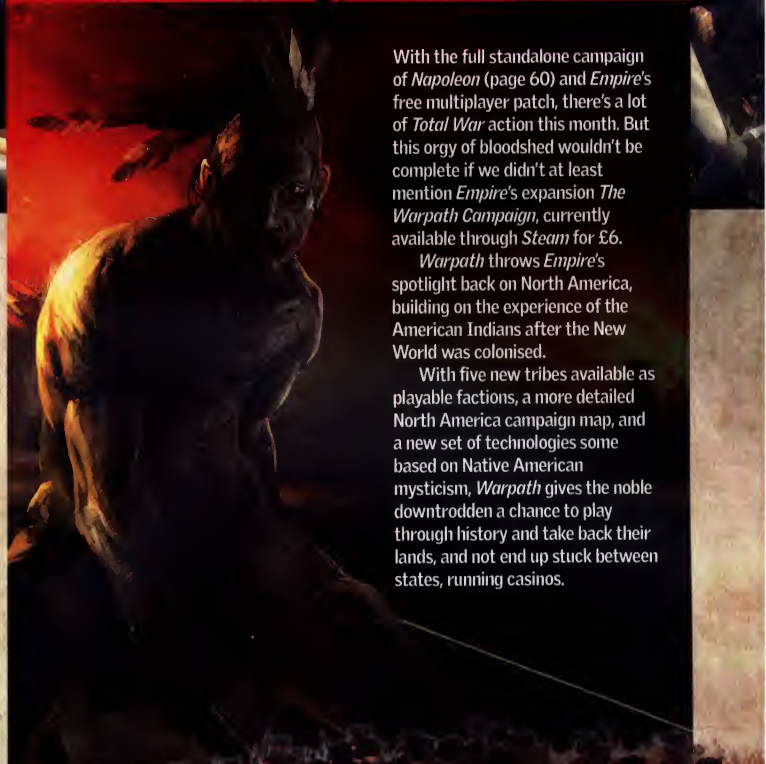
Whatever the tinkering that's gone in the background with *Empire: Total War*, it's all designed to make the multiplayer campaign play as fair and true to the single-player campaign as possible. The slightly simplistic upshot is it's the same game, but with more of a reason to care. After all, when did computer AI phone you up to call you a prick for sabotaging his cities? **PCZ**



Night Boat, the crime-solving boat.

WARPATH

They just can't stop releasing things




With the full standalone campaign of *Napoleon* (page 60) and *Empire's* free multiplayer patch, there's a lot of *Total War* action this month. But this orgy of bloodshed wouldn't be complete if we didn't at least mention *Empire's* expansion *The Warpath Campaign*, currently available through *Steam* for £6.

Warpath throws *Empire's* spotlight back on North America, building on the experience of the American Indians after the New World was colonised.

With five new tribes available as playable factions, a more detailed North America campaign map, and a new set of technologies some based on Native American mysticism, *Warpath* gives the noble downtrodden a chance to play through history and take back their lands, and not end up stuck between states, running casinos.

"Having another human on the map changes the game in a fundamental way"

 **pcspecialist.co.uk**

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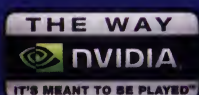
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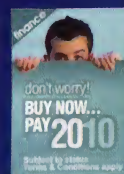
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UPFRONT **HAN** ON

Don't question things. Just accept it and move on.

ETA
**FEB
2010**

TETHER BITTER END...

JUST CAUSE 2

How many times can *Steve Hogarty* say 'grapple' in one paragraph?

DEVELOPER Avalanche PUBLISHER Eidos WEBSITE justcause2.com

HERE'S A GAME where you can leap from a mile-tall skyscraper, dive through the air bullet-like towards an enemy gunship, grapple on to said gunship, swing onto its front, grab onto the cockpit, shoot its occupants, commandeer it and fly it towards the building you just leapt from, bail out as it collides with the

glass tower, parachute to ground level, find a man and tether him to a gas canister, shoot the gas canister so that it zips about uncontrollably, and laugh manically as the confused bystander is dragged through the sky by a flailing makeshift rocket.

That's one thing you can do. From a standing position you can grapple almost any surface and pull yourself towards it. While being reeled in you can open your parachute and sail skywards, and while airborne you can grapple to surfaces below you to keep your momentum up in a way that probably wouldn't work in real life. To this end, and unlike in the previous game, you're never stranded on the ground for long – as long as you can grapple, you can fly. Where *Just Cause's*

use of the grapping hook and parachute was restricted, the sequel allows you to use both at any time.

HOOK...

The hook's abilities have been shaken up too, you're now able to hold the grapple

key down to attach it to somebody or something, before releasing it while aimed at another object to attach one to the other. Tether two people together in this way and they'll be flung towards each other with lethal, hilarious force. Tether a man to the back of a car and



THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Grapple and parachute everywhere
- ✓ Breathtaking vertical distances
- ✓ Tether anything to anything
- ✓ Visually stunning
- ✗ Exhausting

THE STORY SO FAR AVALANCHE



RUMBLE
Avalanche is formed.
Four people are buried
alive under the snow.

2003



JUST CAUSE
Avalanche debuts with
the lovely but hardly
radical *Just Cause*.

2005



THE HUNTER
Made in conjunction
with Emote, an online
hunting sim. Blizarre.

2009



JUST CAUSE 2
This'll easily become
the best thing
Avalanche has done.

2010

Realistic? No. Fun?
Damn straight.

CHAOS THEORY

The game rationalises it like this: by destroying government property (tankers, missile silos, towers etc, all marked with a helpful red logo) you fuel internal conflicts on the islands of Panau, upsetting the balance of power. This (for whatever reason) gives you increased influence, and so opens up new missions. It also allows you to buy better things from the black market – a travelling salesman in a Chinook helicopter who'll show up wherever you throw down a beacon. He'll also ferry you about the massive game world without much fuss. Essentially, it's an incentive to mindlessly destroy thing you see in order to proceed through the game.

When this is a taxi, you're
in a rough neighbourhood.

he'll be dragged along by it. Tether a car to a road during a chase and it will be violently jolted, flipping and spinning madly through the air before coming to a standstill. Tether an enemy to a ceiling and he'll dangle helplessly. Melee him to death while he's hanging, and the game cheerfully awards you a piñata kill.

Tethers, tethers, tethers. You'll bloody love tethers. Otherwise the grapple is comprehensively useful, working in almost every circumstance we tried during our hands-on session. Riding on top of a limousine before tethering the front of the vehicle to an overhead sign caused the car to back flip, launching us into the air. You can even tow vehicles using it, if you can imagine such a luxury.

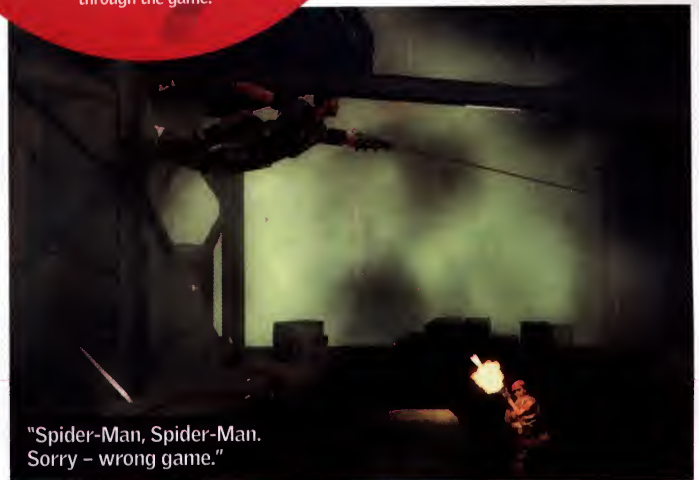
LINE...

Besides the grappling hook and parachute fun, the world itself is huge. Not just in the north, east, south and west, but in the up and down too. Impossibly close climates range from



vast desert plains to dense jungles and snowy mountains. Dubai-grade skyscrapers rise up from icy cliff faces and tower above cities, their sheer altitude demanding they be base jumped from. Where *Mirror's Edge* achieved a sense of terrifying vertigo through cleverly working the camera angles, *Just Cause 2* does it through brute force – you're thousands of feet above the earth and, thanks in no small part to infinite draw distances, it feels like it.

The map's peppered with a reassuring quantity of stuff too. Every settlement contains a number of collectibles (which upgrade your vehicles and weapons), and



destructible government property – through collecting everything, and blowing up the rest, you'll be given a percentage completion level for that settlement. You won't be able to walk far without being reminded that you're 8% away from fully looting the nearest town.

AND SINKER

Thirty heavily guarded generals live in *Just Cause 2*'s archipelago, and for whatever reason they're to be murdered. Then you've got the races, a returning feature, in which you'll chuck a vehicle through some checkpoints against the clock, whether it be a fighter jet or a moped. Even the side missions are more interesting this time around, having been

promoted from simple courier tasks to exploding giant satellite dishes and jumping off buildings in slow motion.

Just Cause 2 is a loopy open-world shooter that stuns by offering an abundance of choice. It'll live or die on the diversity of its missions, given the stamina needed to endure the utter madness of tethering two people together by their faces for an hour. Whether the carnage can form lasting appeal is still to be seen. Our guess is that it won't, but don't worry about it. Once *Just Cause 2* grapples you by the brain and you're jumping from helicopters and hi-jacking fighter jets in mid-air, it's unlikely that you'll care about what you'll be doing 20 minutes from now. **PCZ**

**"Whether the carnage can form
lasting appeal is still to be seen"**

ETA
**26 FEB
2010****PLAY IT AGAIN, SAM...**

SPLINTER CELL CONVICTION

**"Honestly, who throws a chair?"
demands a furious *Steve Hogarty***

DEVELOPER Ubisoft Montreal PUBLISHER Ubisoft [WEBSITE splintercell.com](http://www.splintercell.com)

SAM FISHER CROUCHES behind a crate of some description, the moonlight glinting off his tri-focal goggles (which we swear are smaller than they used to be) as terrorists chatter just feet in front of him, oblivious to their proximity to somebody famous.

Past a yard strewn with vehicles and short walls, a seemingly abandoned warehouse looms. Unexpectedly, the words "Interrogate the Black Arrow officer" are projected on to the front of the building in 30ft tall letters for all to see. Several

terrorists turn to point at it. Another one shouts something angrily before they all start firing into the air and screaming, driven mad by the realisation that somebody's coming to interrogate them. "Bloody hell," says Sam as he skulks away, embarrassed, "that's the last time I project my objectives onto buildings."

Except that's not what really happens because, as I'm patiently informed, the giant letters are merely a narrative device and therefore undetectable by terrorists. Objectives and cinematics are beamed on to surfaces in the game world as a clever and contemporary means of delivering information to the player without Sam having to squint at his product-placement PDA mid-mission.

VANISHING POINT

No, instead of alerting everybody to my presence by means of magic hi-def projection, I opt to blunder into the yard, clumsily grab the first body I see and, using him as a human shield, attempt to down the remaining baddies before snapping the guy's neck like



Who keeps projecting those words like that?

a twig and leaping into a nearby gutter, damp with my own cowardice. In the scuffle, I discover one of *Conviction's* primary new features: the notion of a last-known position.

Though it's something AI claims to be have been doing for a long time in many other games, *Conviction* employs it in a far more literal fashion. Fisher will leave behind a ghostly silhouette at the spot where he left the enemy's field of vision. It's this marker that your pursuers will focus on, either by raining down covering fire or approaching cautiously, and the obvious signposting of your supposed position helps you flank and surprise misdirected goons with far greater ease than would otherwise be possible. In this case, I surface from the far end of the gutter, circle the yard to find the guards firing into the pit at where they think I am.

"Mark and execute" is another of *Conviction's* buzz-wordy features, essentially allowing you to tag nearby enemies from behind cover – or from the other side of a door if you've got a snake-cam – before bursting into the room and swiftly murdering them with stylised, highly accurate aplomb. Slow-motion headshots, firing off to the side while sort of clutching the pistol to Sam's chest in a way that doesn't sound cool on paper – it's automated, rapid-fire death-dealing.

Sam danced on the guy's head. Literally.



Actually, carrying a gun like that is legal in the US.



THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Looks great
- ✓ Still oozes class
- ✓ Fantastic script
- ✓ More co-op
- ✗ Where's the stealth?

THE STORY SO FAR...
SPLINTER CELL



SPLINTER CELL
The first game was all fancy shadow tech and men in tights.

2002



PANDORA TOMORROW
More jungly, but less good than the first.

2004



CHAOS THEORY
A lot less jungly, a lot more shadowy, and the best in the series.

2005



DOUBLE AGENT
Bugged to buggery, which marred a fantastic game.

2006



Sam's just scratching his nose. Really.



That's hardly covert now is it?

SONAR, YET SO FAR

Here's a pop trivia question for you – can you name each of the three view modes available to Fisher in the original *Splinter Cell*? You got it. There was one for detecting toothpaste, one was a pair of Specsavers reaction lenses, and the last one, of course, was a pair of those red/blue 3D glasses from the '80s.

In *Conviction* we're introduced to Sam's ultra high-frequency sonar goggles, which seem to function as an one-size-fits-all detection tool. Enemies are highlighted through walls, much as they were with thermal vision, while traces of explosives are flagged up, a bit (OK, a lot) like Batman's detective view in *Arkham Asylum*. In fact, *Conviction* really is Batman-inspired. Which is no bad thing, considering how brilliant *Arkham Asylum* is.

Doing a number two, or looking for a contact lens? Your call.

Once targets are marked, a single-button press is all that's needed to guarantee a bullet to the head.

DEADLY HUGS

Neutering this powerful ability is the caveat that, in order to carry out executions Fisher must first perform a successful melee attack on one of his marked targets – be that falling through a skylight on to an unsuspecting victim, or simply grabbing a guy from behind and plunging a sharp piece of metal through his ear.

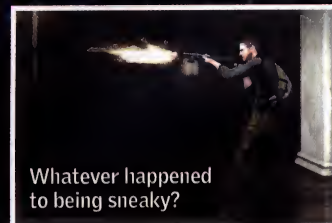
A cover system has also found its way into *Conviction*, with minimalist icons appearing at corners and allowing Fisher to sprint and slide into safety.

Our anti-hero's infamous exchanges with the countless men whose necks he grabs and lives he threatens now require you to intermittently smash their heads against objects to elicit confessions or mission-crucial information. We've already seen Fisher use a man's face to wipe a toilet bowl, this time around he stabs a thug through the hand, pinning him to a car bonnet, or a tree stump, depending on where Fisher's psychopathic attack is initiated.

A renewed multiplayer focus is something worth getting excited about too, with a promised co-op mode (*Chaos Theory's* was highly original, if underappreciated) being worked on as we speak. Which makes this still very much *Splinter Cell* then, despite the pendulum of influence having swung from Bauer to Bourne (that floppy haired, chair-throwing interloper we saw two years ago) and back again.

There's a definite feeling that Fisher's more of a vicious hunter this time round though, rather than the acrobatic, shadow-bound whisper of previous games. And *Conviction* isn't even particularly dark either, a hit in the balls for purists who wonder where their skin-tight catsuits and neck-snapping sneakiness have disappeared to.

We're no barriers to change, and the highly polished, skilled nonchalance of



Whatever happened to being sneaky?

this neo-Bauer Fisher will be difficult to resist.

Gadgets, hiding, thermal vision, it'll all still be in there beneath this new veneer of skull-to-porcelain exploits, speedy headshots, stabbed-into-a-bonnet shoutiness, and project-your-intentions flashness. **PCZ**

"A renewed multiplayer focus is worth getting excited about"

ETA
**SUMMER
2010**

When Concrete Attacks.

**DEMONS AND SMOOTHIES...**

THE SECRET WORLD

Marco Fiori whispers very quietly in fear of assassination

DEVELOPER Funcom PUBLISHER Funcom WEBSITE darkdaysarecoming.com

UNLIKE THEIR LAST effort, *Age of Conan*, Funcom are using an original setting for this online game: the real world.

But don't worry, this isn't a game that has you washing +1 dishes before travelling to the supermarket to purchase increasingly nutritious vegetables. Like the classic shooter/RPG

Deus Ex, *The Secret World* is grounded in our most intriguing urban legends, myths and secret societies. This gives the Funcom the chance to create lore that's accessible to everyone, but lets them apply their own interpretation.

Funcom's focus is on the hidden orders popularised by the likes of Dan Brown, *National Treasure*, and the tinfoil-hat-wearing lunatics who fuel conspiracy theories. The factions – the Illuminati, Templars, and the Dragon – give players the chance to explore material that's ripe for development.

WORLD WAR WRONG

Each faction will have home cities – New York, London, and Seoul respectively – based in reality, so don't

expect to see much strange architecture to begin with, though that's not saying it's going to be an everyday experience. Vampires, Atlantis, and the end of the Mayan calendar (2012) will all play a role in the game.

The factions themselves are full of character. The Templar are a modern take on the traditional crusaders, while the Illuminati are far more corporate with order and money driving their gains. The Dragon are the most mysterious, preferring to spread chaos from behind the scenes like a clandestine puppet master.

Funcom are staying coy about *The Secret World's* narrative specifics, bar that its history tracks back 100 million years. There's also the fantasy realm

Agartha which will come later, although details are still sketchy on what it'll entail. So we'll just have to wait for the announcement of the inevitable expansion pack.

What they are sure of is the game's combat. Your powers are identical across the factions. Swords, shotguns, sub-machine guns all lend themselves to responsive, quick combat. Those

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ London's in a game!
- ✓ No level grinding
- ✓ Vicious combat
- ✓ Guns and swords
- ✗ *Age of Conan* shipped incomplete

London in the summer.



THE STORY SO FAR...
FUNCOM



THE LONGEST JOURNEY
Funcom gets off to a flying start.



ANARCHY ONLINE
The game that took MMOs to the masses.



DREAMFALL
Finally, a sequel to *The Longest Journey*! Oh, it's just plain average.



AGE OF CONAN
Needed a few more months in the studio, before going live.

2000

2001

2006

2008



He didn't see the "Beware of the lycanthrope" signs.

THE SECRET GARDEN

Why Seoul will captivate us

How often do you find Asia in a game? It seems that every time aliens, mutants or terrorists attack the world, it's directed at the West. Maybe they have a collective hatred of Burger King. Digressions aside, it's refreshing to see Asia getting some love, and Godzilla being nowhere to be found.

With Seoul as the capital of the Dragon faction, expect pagodas, narrow city streets populated by Koreans and rolling mountains aplenty.

South Korea should provide a much-needed contrast to the sterile urban centres of London and New York. Also, if the game's music is localised, expect some soothing melodies to mediate to. That or chop some vampires' arms off.



Shooting at a petrol station is not smart.

thinking of *Age of Conan*'s problems with scraps will have their views quickly quashed. The combat has been built from the ground up to provide a fluid experience never really seen in MMOs before. Expect plenty of leaping, slicing, shooting and everything else that resides in between.

GRIND FREE

As your choice of faction is purely cosmetic, it means you can focus on bettering your skills rather than worrying if you've selected the weaker faction. Even more interesting is Funcom's choice to do away with traditional levels and classes. Your avatar is defined by his abilities. The way you play is reflected in your skills. It leads to organic gaming where you are no longer constricted by a poor choice in the beginning. The developers are also hoping it'll narrow the gap between new players and veterans.

Chuck in player-made organisations that go by the name of cabals (i.e. guilds) and it's obvious Funcom are aiming to reward cooperative players. *Age of Conan* struggled with social

interaction and it's good to see they're attempting to rectify their mistake. That's not saying you'll be forced to interact, the game has plenty for the solo player. It's just as playable alone, but team-based quests and other community-based bonuses mean you'll be better off if you're social. Leaderboards and the implementation of social networks are planned – another way to let you keep track of your character's progress.

But perhaps the best thing about *The Secret World* is it links to our reality. While there are plenty of mythical beasts and supernatural attacks, you'll be fighting through the streets of recognisable cities. Abandoned cars, decrepit petrol stations, and rusting scrap yards give the impression that this is a world in decay.

On top of that, the scope for expansion is unfathomable. Our world alone is huge and that's before Funcom start being all creative. **PCZ**



Shouldn't you be riding a bantha?

PC ZONE PRESENTS...

The 10 Scariest Games Of All Time

As the spooky season arrives, we trawl the archives to exume the most frightening, terrifying and horrific games for Halloween

10 LEFT 4 DEAD (2008)

OTHER GAMES ON our list do atmosphere and outright shocks better, but none can send you into a blind panic quite like *Left 4 Dead*. Every game is different depending on who you're teaming up with and the dynamic difficulty and pacing, meaning you can't afford to get complacent. With only your flashlight and three teammates for company, it's a relentless ordeal of shooting hordes of half-seen, screaming zombies. It's also one of the few horror games whose monsters are genuinely scary: the Hunter, and in particular the Witch, are two of the most terrifying enemies you'll ever come across.

BLOODCURDLING BIT: Disturbing a Witch is sure to mean certain death for one of your party, but your flashlight still needs to seek out zombie hordes. It's a tough call.

Think he's given up attacking you? Wrong.



9 RESIDENT EVIL 4 (2007)

BY THE TIME it arrived on the PC two years after its GameCube debut, most of its plot secrets had been spilled and its ability to shock diluted. This still didn't stop *Resident Evil 4* from being one trouser-soiling game. The decision to replace the traditional shambling, moaning zombies of old with the not-zombie pacy Ganados turns out to be a truly inspiring one. Suddenly there's a new level of threat as the rampaging rednecks pour forward wielding knives, sickles and axes. The opening scene in the village, in which you fend off Ganados while trapped inside farm buildings, is superbly engineered and feels like it's stepped straight from a George A. Romero film.

BLOODCURDLING BIT: The guy on fire who bursts out of the oven and heads straight for you. Millions of gamers lost bowel control at this point.

Creepy, no?



8 PENUMBRA: BLACK PLAGUE (2008)

THIS IS THE MOST underrated game in our top 10, and one that may have even passed you by altogether. You play as explorer Philip, who awakens in a locked room in an underground research facility after setting out to discover the truth about his dead father. If you love your horror, you'll know that underground research facilities usually mean nasty experiments gone wrong, and in this case it results in a horde of zombie-like facility staff called "the Infected" blocking your every turn.

Although adventure games can be hit-and-miss, the first-person perspective makes the shocks sharper and the atmosphere thicker, and the lack of combat means you're relying on creeping around. *Penumbra* also sports a nifty control system whereby you move the mouse to manipulate objects such as doors – long before PS3 owners got excited about *Heavy Rain*'s supposedly innovative controls.

BLOODCURDLING BIT: Making too much noise and attracting a flashlight-wielding Infected. Your heart pounds as you hide in the darkness hoping it doesn't find you.



SCARY MONSTERS

Meet the biggest frights in PC gaming



PIGSY - MANHUNT

Being a naked, morbidly obese, chainsaw wielding serial killer is bad enough. But the rotting pig head mask is nightmare inducing. You only meet Pigsy once, but that's enough.



WITCH - LEFT 4 DEAD

Incurring the wrath of a Witch is the biggest mistake one can make in *Left 4 Dead*. Best keep that flashlight pointing somewhere away from her face.



HEAD CRABS - HALF-LIFE

You kill thousands of these scuttling critters, yet no matter how many meet their death at your hands, they remain the scariest thing about this FPS series.



SHODAN - SYSTEM SHOCK 2

The AI with the weird voice and utter contempt for the human race is the most terrifying sentient computer since HAL sang *Daisy Bell* in 2001.

ALMA - F.E.A.R.

Seriously disturbing, our glimpses of the psychic sociopath Alma flit between an older, naked version and a child in a red dress. Perverved.

"For every lovingly detailed Art Deco setting, there's a deadly young girl or a crazy surgeon wanting to do bad things to you"



Rapture's justice system was harsh but unfair.

7 BIOSHOCK (2008)

A FOLLOW-UP to (and a near-total rip-off of) *System Shock 2* manages to live up to its predecessor by immersing you fully in its underwater world. It sounds a simple thing to achieve, yet only a handful of games really make you feel like you're there and not just controlling a videogame character.

Exploring Rapture is equal parts serene and terrifying. For every lovingly detailed Art Deco setting you come across, there's a deadly young girl or a crazy surgeon wanting to do bad things to you. Perhaps the scariest thing of all is the way you feel sorry for killing some of these enemies.

BLOODCURDLING BIT: The dentist in the medical pavilion. After you steal stuff from his surgery, he pops up behind you through a mist.

SHODAN – the AI with the scary, yet a bit sexy, stutter.



6 SYSTEM SHOCK 2 (1999)

WE CAN'T BELIEVE it's been 10 years since Irrational Games and Looking Glass conspired to create not only one of the scariest games of all time, but one of the greatest games of all time. Set aboard a spacecraft called the Von Braun, you play as an amnesiac crewman battling infected crew members called the Many and their creator and nemesis SHODAN, an artificial intelligence that makes HAL look like your BFF. As well as sporting a brilliant character customisation system, *System Shock 2* is probably one of the best sounding and best lit games too. Clanking machinery, dark corridors you simply don't want to go down, and of course the Many themselves: "We are many and you are one. How can you hope to prevail against us?" Eek!

BLOODCURDLING BIT: The chilling logs from the crew members, which detail the spread of the infection and the paranoia aboard the ship.

Hot nurses. Well, hot if you're into shagging zombies.



5 SILENT HILL 2: INNER FEARS (2003)

IF YOU NEED reminding why *Silent Hill 2* is one of the greatest survival horror game of all time, take a look at sequels *The Room* and *Homecoming*: the gulf in class is huge. Resisting the temptation to make a direct sequel, developer Team Silent introduced a new story, new characters, and new enemies such as Pyramid Head. The confusing story and multiple endings make it hard to determine what's going on, but the theory that protagonist James Sunderland may have killed his ill wife and is then unable to live with the guilt is very powerful.

BLOODCURDLING BIT: Hiding in a closet from Pyramid Head while you watch it do naughty things with mannequins.



BAN THIS SICK FILTH!

Feeling squeamish? Then avert your eyes from the goriest and sickest games ever



CARMAGEDDON (1997)

Packed full of gore and dismemberment, the controversial mowing down of innocent pedestrians would still cause an uproar today.



THE PUNISHER (2005)

Torture sequences include throwing enemies into woodchippers and holding someone under a drilling machine. Sick enough for you?



GEARS OF WAR (2007)

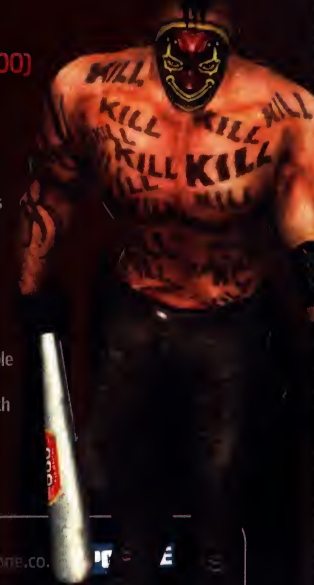
An assault rifle on its own is a bit boring. An assault rifle with a bloody great chainsaw attached to it results in lots of faces being rearranged.

SOLDIER OF FORTUNE (2000)

The *Rambo* of first-person shooters. The extreme violence allows you to turn an enemy into a stump by shooting off all his limbs and head.

MANHUNT (2004)

Welcome to a world where stabbing people in the face or suffocating them with a plastic bag is considered normal.



HONOURABLE MENTIONS

The horror heavyweights that didn't make the cut



DOOM 3 (2004)

Hasn't dated, and it's still a remarkable example of how superb lighting can dictate mood.



CLIVE BARKER'S UNDYING

A critical hit yet a commercial flop, Undying conjures up plenty of underwear-staining moments.



ALONE IN THE DARK (1992)

Looks quaint now, but its initial impact and influence on the survival horror genre can't be underestimated.



CALL OF CTHULHU: DARK CORNERS OF THE EARTH (2006)

Lovecraftian first-person adventure game is deeply atmospheric, though you have to put up with more than a few bugs.



S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL

The unusual setting, mutants and overall bleakness of the game world make for an unsettling experience.

Altogether now: "SHIT!"



4 ALIENS VS PREDATOR 2 (2001)

THE HUGE SUCCESSFUL original was chilling enough, but this sequel was just that little bit more polished with some finely engineered shocks. Playing as the Predator is by the far the weakest of the three races as far as getting a horror fix goes, but it's a different story when you take on the role of a Marine, whose motion detector is the scariest thing in the game. It's supposed to help you detect moving objects, which developer Monolith uses to great effect by having loads of stuff in the game move around. Just when you think you've got the jump on all these red herrings, that's usually when a Xenomorph attacks, only you don't quite know which angle it's going to leap at you from.

BLOODCURDLING BIT: The increasingly rapid bleeping of the motion detector, which tells you an alien or three can't be too far away.



Once you've finished vomiting at this sight, you can get slicing.

5 DEAD SPACE (2008)

LISTING THE INFLUENCES of *Dead Space* is easy: *Event Horizon*, *Aliens*, *The Thing*... the list is exhaustive, and yet the game still ended up as last year's freshest survival horror hit. While rival games filled their boots with rampaging zombies and spooky ghosts, *Dead Space* was an old-fashioned space opera battle against mutating aliens. The big reveals of each monster are worth the wait and often spectacularly gruesome, but it's the bits in between that make your blood run cold. Ominous sound effects, long trawls through flickering corridors, spectacular lighting and an intuitive interface all combine to produce the equivalent of walking through a haunted house in space. And when the jolt moments do eventually arrive, they're timed to perfection.

BLOODCURDLING BIT: Any time a seemingly dead Necromorph suddenly gets up off the ground. A cheap trick, but it works every time!

Alma was not a believer in conditioner.

2 F.E.A.R. (2005)

AN APT NAME for this most disturbing of first-person shooters. Hitting on the fact that children are always effectively creepy in horror films (especially Japanese ones such as *The Ring* and *The Grudge*) developer Monolith crafted a story around a ghostly girl with supernatural powers who wreaks havoc and causes you to suffer alarming hallucinations.

Whenever Alma appeared in her red dress and ghostly blank face, you knew something bad was about to kick off. Is she real or just a figment of your character's imagination? Either way, she's one of gaming's most distinctive and terrifying villains.

The not-entirely-successful sequel tried to give her a little more backstory, which only proved that the less we know about our worst nightmares, the scarier they are. Don't think you've seen the last of Alma though.

BLOODCURDLING BIT: A naked older Alma is intercut with the younger Alma in the red dress just before she lunges at you.

Something tells me he isn't a plumber.

"The tone is utterly savage throughout"

1 CONDEMNED: CRIMINAL ORIGINS (2006)

CERTAINLY NOT THE best game on our list, but definitely the scariest, *Condemned* takes top honours simply because it combines both outright shock moments and oodles of atmosphere better than any other game. The tone is utterly savage throughout as you take on the role of criminal investigator Ethan Thomas hunting a serial killer in Metro City. There's a psycho hiding around every corner waiting to surprise you. The unflinchingly brutal hand-to-hand combat is constant throughout the game, making *Manhunt* look like a game of hide-and-seek.

BLOODCURDLING BIT: Taking a close-up photo of dead Mr Tibbits in the locker, which is when he suddenly decides to grab you.

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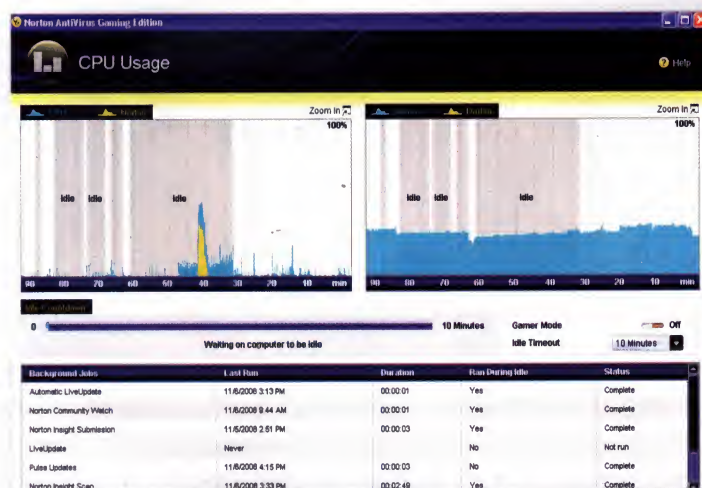
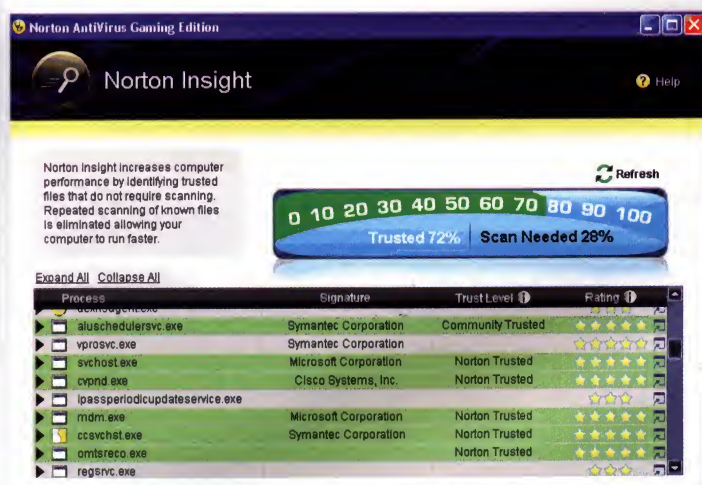
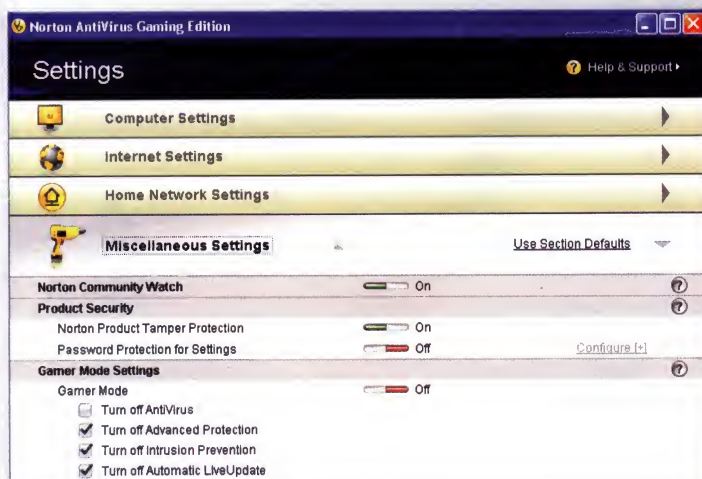
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PC ZONE – the last one to subscribe is spambot pretending to be a cute Russian!

A man with a shocked expression, wide eyes, and an open mouth is holding a pair of 3D glasses to his eyes. He is wearing a dark shirt and a tie. In the background, there are several zombie-like faces with pale skin, dark eye sockets, and some with blood or gore on their faces. The overall scene is dark and horror-themed.

THE 3D REVOLUTION

Adam Hartley finds that PC video games are leading the 3D tech revolution

IMAGINE PLAYING EIDOS' sublime *Batman: Arkham Asylum* and feeling like you can reach out your hands towards your monitor to hoist yourself up in that memorable lift shaft scene. Or playing EA's recent *Burnout Paradise* or *Need for Speed: Shift* and reaching out to try to physically pick up your car or motorbike as it floats in 3D space in front of your very eyes. Or becoming so immersed in Capcom's *Resident Evil 5* late into the night after work that you leave an embarrassing stain on the office chair.

Leading consumer technology brands are tripping over themselves to get in on what is widely agreed to be the next major tech revolution in gaming. Proper 3D gaming is, according to the likes of EA, Capcom, Eidos, Sony, Samsung, NVIDIA, Viewsonic, Panasonic and many more, that thing that the tech and gaming industries love more than anything else.

From our recent play tests of the 3D versions of all the games mentioned above, we are very much sold on both the current capability and immense potential of this new tech.

If you've seen a recent 3D movie at your local multiplex then you will already know that 3D digital projector technology has come on in leaps and bounds since the gimmickry of the schlock sci-fi of the '50s or the embarrassment that was *Jaws 3D* back in 1983. (For the record, our recent favourites include Disney/Pixar's *Up* and Neil Gaiman's child-frightener *Coraline*). And gaming is already way, way ahead of Tinseltown. And DreamWorks' Animation CEO Jeffrey Katzenberg is already on record stating that, "3D in the home will be led by gamers."

NVIDIA's 3D Vision tech is the first decent bit of stereoscopic 3D gaming kit on the shelf – a combination of high-tech wireless glasses and software "which automatically transforms hundreds of PC games into full stereoscopic 3D," according to NVIDIA's UK PR manager, Ben Berraondo: "In addition, it also lets you watch 3D movies and 3D digital photographs in eye popping, crystal-clear quality."

THE SCIENCE BIT

The bare bones fact is that once you experience it for yourself you are not going to want to return to the boring old world of the flat 2D monitor, because the tech just works. Despite what the rumours say, it doesn't give you headaches, and it makes gaming even better.

If you still don't believe us, take heed of the number of major videogame developers and publishers pumping resources into developing 3D-tailored versions of their latest blockbusters to ensure

that they squeeze the best possible experience out of the latest 3D-ready screens.

NVIDIA's 3D kit is made up of a pair of rather fetching rechargeable Roy Orbison-esque active shutter glasses, alongside an infrared emitter which transmits data wirelessly to your specs within a 20ft radius (for more on this, see 'This might be how it works' on the next page).

Perhaps the most expensive outlay to make the whole thing work is the fact that you are going to need either a 120Hz LCD monitor (60Hz for each eye), or a high-definition 3D projector or TV. Though reasonably affordable gaming bundles are already seeping onto the market from the likes of Samsung and Viewsonic (see 'What the kit costs').

LEAPING AT YOU

NVIDIA and their developer partners are now working on making new PC games that will carry a "Made for 3D Vision" badge, a means of letting you know that developers have gone that little bit further to squeeze a bunch of extra whizz-bang 3D effects into their games.

In our recent 3D play tests, we can certainly vouch for the fact that *Resident Evil 5* (our latest survival

"NFS: Shift turned out to be 587% better when it was played in 3D Vision"

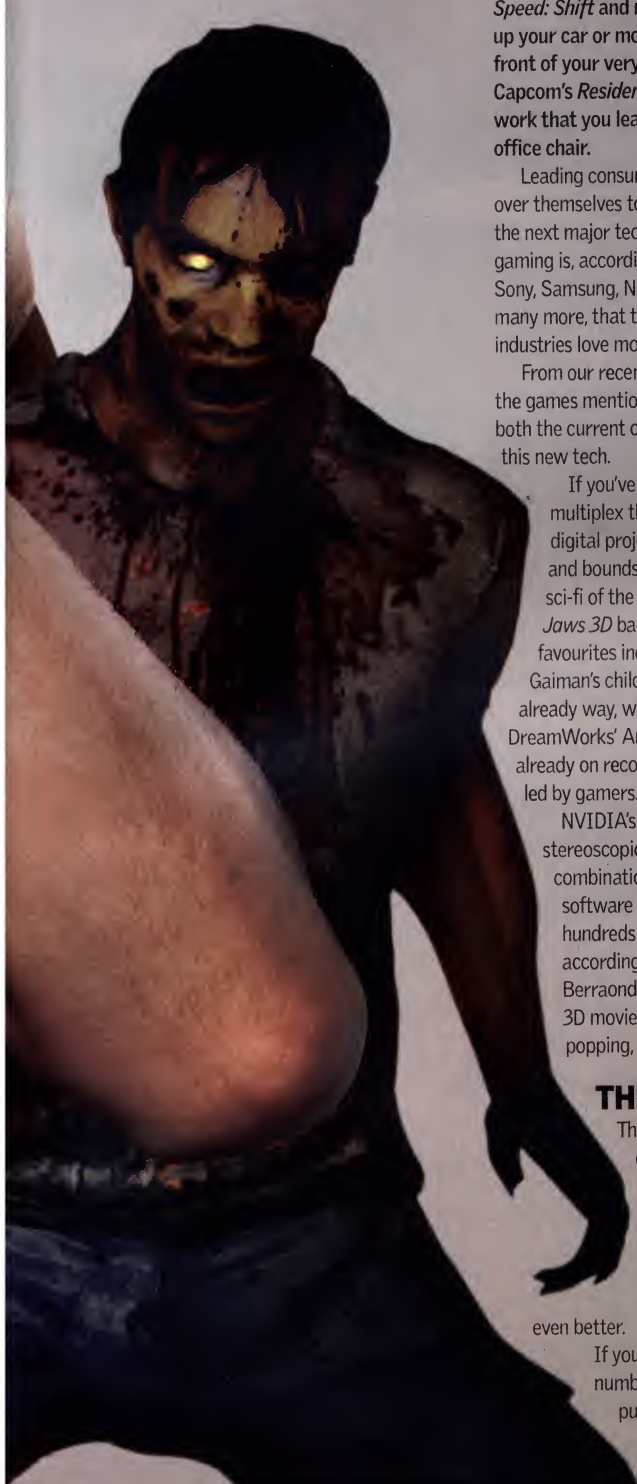
horror benchmark) had us at close-to-pant-pooling stage quicker than any game yet and that EA's recent *Burnout Paradise* and the new *Need For Speed: Shift* turned out to be 587% better when played in 3D Vision.

Our favourite "Made for 3D Vision" game of the moment is Eidos' sublime *Batman: Arkham Asylum*, developed by Kentish Town-based Rocksteady Studios.

"From our point-of-view 3D is something to consider now, simply because the technology is there," says Rocksteady Studios' director Sefton Hill. "Though I wouldn't say that we are at the stage where it was in any way mainstream yet. We are getting ready for it. We are certainly on the cutting edge of it right now, at that 'bleeding edge' stage where we are trying it out with different games."

EA's UK marketing manager Doug McConkey agrees, reminding us that while 3D is not even mainstream in film "in gaming we are ahead of film... it adds another dimension to gaming – no pun intended! – but what we strive to do as videogame makers is to make immersive, believable, interesting environments that people want to be engaged with. And having them in proper 3D vision helps that sense of immersion."

For now though, developers are in something of a catch 22 situation, where gamers don't want to invest in it until there are enough decent "Made for 3D" games and developers don't want to



THE 3D REVOLUTION

WHAT THE KIT COSTS

Turning your PC into a 3D gaming machine isn't as pricey as you think

To get involved with the latest "Made for 3D" games you'll need a pair of these fetching GeForce 3D Vision Glasses from NVIDIA. If you are already rocking a new 120Hz monitor, then you can pick up NVIDIA's 3D goggles online from the likes of Amazon for £115.

However, if you also need to invest in a new screen, then the likes of Samsung, Viewsonic and Dell are already offering decently-priced 3D-ready screens. If budget is an issue then we would plump for Viewsonic's £269 22in FuHzon VX2268wm (above). This is a well-designed slim screen with some decent-sounding in-built speakers.

Or if you have a little more cash to play with then you can pick up a £400 all-in *Batman: Arkham Asylum* bundle, which gets you a 120Hz Samsung 223RZ3D monitor (top-right), NVIDIA's 3D kit (right) and copy of the game itself.

The kit should set you back no more than £400.



THIS MIGHT BE HOW IT WORKS

The science of three-dee, clumsily and inadequately explained

The challenge in creating the magical 3D wonder-effect is in delivering a different image to each eye at the same time – or at least, at what we perceive to be the same time.

Those red and cyan glasses do this by blocking certain colours from reaching either eye, thereby creating two different images which the brain requires to recognise depth. This is rather a rubbish way of doing it though, as the resulting image suffers from highly distorted colouration.

The new polarising technology is a bit cleverer. Specialised TVs beam out two images at once – one image made up of light travelling in vertically orientated waves (think of it like ticker tape streaming out of the screen), the other made up of horizontal light waves. Polarising specs filter these two different types of light: one lens has horizontal slits, allowing only horizontal light to pass through, while the other only allows

vertical light to pass. So again, both eyes see different things, and the illusion of 3D is created.

The technology NVIDIA use is even more complex again. The monitors used for this system refresh 120 times a second, switching between the two images faster than the eyes can detect. This alone won't create a 3D effect, as both eyes still see both images, so a pair of active shutter glasses rapidly open and close alternate shutters in front of both eyes. For 1/120th of a second your left eye sees one image, for the next 1/120th your right eye sees another, and so on. These are speeds your eyes can't keep up with, and the result is that both eyes see different images. Voila, 3D again.

Interestingly, birds have better refresh rates than ours. So a pigeon wouldn't be able to play *Resident Evil 5* in 3D. Not without giving itself a migraine.



Lookin' smart, champ.



See women
come alive
with 3D tech.

➤ invest in it until there are enough people with the kit who want to use it.

It's apparently a fairly straightforward process to make a decent 3D Vision version of a game, according to Rocksteady's Hill.

"We work pretty closely with NVIDIA, so I suppose we had a bit of an advantage on that front. But there is not that much of a barrier in terms of getting the 3D to work well. The barrier is really more about designing games that leverage the 3D tech in the best way."

Stephen Viljoen, CEO of *NFS: Shift* developer Slightly Mad Studios explained to us how preparing the 3D Vision friendly version improved his own team's attention to detail.

"Certainly having that extra dimension just helps in terms of bringing out the sometimes overlooked details in the game so much more. In *Shift*, because we designed these highly detailed cockpit models, when you are sitting inside the cockpit in full 3D Vision mode every single button and dial suddenly look like actual real objects sitting there right in front of you. For me personally I think 3D has very, very strong potential to be the next big thing."

As with any new tech, 3D gaming on PC still has its detractors. Some developers are adamant that it's not suitable for extended hours of play, claiming that it gives people headaches.

Also, some older games that haven't been specifically designed for use with the latest 3D glasses and hardware often fall foul of what developers refer to

HUH – SO WHAT?

Have we become a little too blasé about bleeding edge graphics?

We plan to keep our beady eye on what else is set to emerge from NVIDIA's Made for 3D Vision campaign in 2010 and beyond, with plenty of hardware and games devs already wetting our palms in anticipation.

NVIDIA's Ben Berraondo is adamant that after playing decent 3D Vision games "going back to gaming simply in '2D' is difficult" and while having the latest graphics card is always cool, it is "not completely game changing – 3D Vision is."

Need For Speed: Shift producer Stephen Viljoen remembers "the two things that really struck me when I first experienced 3D Vision were the sense of depth – it really does bring things to the fore in an amazing way – and it makes the assets in the game look even higher definition.

"I'd expected the depth of field to look good, but I hadn't banked on the incredible improvements to detail."

"It's like seeing a photograph of a really pretty girl and then seeing her in completely lifelike 3D. She looks really nice in the picture, but then when you effectively see her in real life... Wow! It's a whole new level!"

Stephen Viljoen – Slightly Mad Studios, CEO



The man behind
3D Batman.

"From our point-of-view 3D is something to consider now, simply because the technology is there"

Sefton Hill – *Batman: Arkham Asylum*, director

as 'cheap tricks' with lighting and such, which you wouldn't normally be aware of when looking at a flat 2D screen, but which become painfully obvious when viewed in 3D.

So what of that magical fantasy-wonderland, 'the future'? Is fully-realised 3D gaming married with motion-control where we are all heading?

"Bringing in elements of motion-control will really help when properly used alongside 3D," agrees Hill. "I'm thinking here of things like head-tracking, where you are able to move your head in order to look around objects in a 3D space. And that's really not that far off to be able to do that. Combining things like Microsoft's Natal technology with a 3D experience is going to be achievable in the next couple of years, for sure."

"3D will also let you pick up a control pad or use your keyboard and mouse and just sit back and enjoy becoming more immersed in the game. Maybe it's because I'm just lazy, but I'm certain that it is something that is far more interesting to hardcore gamers than motion control. Sometimes you just want to put on a game and sit back and play it and not dance around in front of the sofa!"

WHAT'S COMING NEXT

"I think what will happen is that we will start incorporating, or designing around the potential of the 3D projection," adds Slightly Mad's Viljoen. "Right now, for example, most games by default only have 3D in one direction. It is into the screen. But we will increasingly see objects hovering outside of the screen."

So next year's 3D version of *NFS* may well see smoke effects floating out of the monitor or little grass particles spinning out of the monitor and right into your face, according to the developer. "And then when we start working with weather effects and you have totally convincing rain, splashing out of the screen towards you and so on. That's when it'll get really interesting."

We've already got our 3D Orbison-goggles on in anticipation. **PCZ**



"No, no, no. Jump towards the screen!"

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ENVIRONMENTALLY UNFRIENDLY...

JAMES CAMERON'S AVATAR

Steve Hogarty falls face-first into the jungle...

JAMES CAMERON'S BLUE-aliened movie tie-in didn't use active shutter technology, rather it used the more comfortable, more effective (and hugely more expensive) polarising tech. Of all the games we tested *Avatar* was the most convincing, with the branches of its alien jungles appearing to reach right out of the screen and poke you the cheeks and eyes – which is to be expected, really. Allow the camera to clip some grass or hanging vines and you'll be accosted by giant pixels

floating inches from your face. Shoot and bullets sail into the screen.

The game itself is unlikely to be anything particularly magnificent, a *Lost Planet*-style third-person action-shooter with fantastic giant creatures and bizarre and colourful flora. No, what's astounding is just how impressive and deceptive the 3D imagery is, to the point where you can't help but reach out and paw clumsily at the air in front of you while muttering "it's like it's right there!"

This is, we're told, the same tech being used in the *Avatar* film – itself

a 3D CGI extravaganza, meaning that to get some idea of why these last few pages have been filled with gibbering, wet-eyed descriptions of what a fully-realised third dimension looks like on a screen, you've only got to visit your nearest over-priced IMAX cinema.

After 15 minutes of play the effect becomes less pronounced, but at this point we're invited to remove our Jarvis Cocker specs and view the game running on a regular monitor. The difference is honestly surprising – we had difficulty discerning the edges of objects in the now entirely flat world and simply

moving the character felt disorientating. It's like stepping back into the Vaseline-smeared hell of standard-definition TV, having been given a glimpse of perfect clarity of high-definition.

So thanks for that Ubisoft Montreal. Thanks for making everything else we play look shit. **PEZ**



"What's astounding is just how deceptive the 3D imagery is"

THE 3D REVOLUTION

In 3D, a surprising number of things seem to fly towards your groin.



The plot? Man kills alien wildlife.

GAMES - THE 3D REVIEW

These are the games that are leading the 3D charge



BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM

Batman's swirly cape throws you into a magnificent stupor, and we spent ages spinning around while gawping at the screen. Grappling up to ledges elicits yet more gawping, and the swinging camera angles during fights had us genuinely flinching. Well, we flinched once. Which was weird. ★★★★★



BURNOUT PARADISE

Your car seems to hover inches from the screen while the roads wind off into what appears to be the distance. Debris from crashes float convincingly towards you and big jumps make you feel a little bit sick, until your eyes get used to it and it all looks 2D again. But 3D definitely adds to the experience, while it works. ★★★★★



PORTAL

You'd think *Portal* would be the ideal proving ground for NVIDIA's tech, but instead it proves to be nausea-inducing delirium. More ghosting, double-vision, and the sense that the back of your head's been anaesthetised and somebody's scooping out spoonfuls of your brain. Of course, that could all be GLaDOS' doing. ★★★★★



RESIDENT EVIL 5

Zombies coming right out of the screen towards you! It's a startling effect, and one that caused a colleague to attempt to point at something "far away" on screen and jab the really expensive monitor with his finger. Don't worry NVIDIA, it's not broken. Just don't look under that Post-it note. ★★★★★



CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE

The blockbuster shooter made us feel ill in 3D. Certainly there was some sense of depth, but everything was shrouded in ghostly artefacts. Like being trapped in the moment right after you've been punched in the nose, but before you feel the pain. In short *Call of Duty* 3D isn't much in the way of fun. ★★★★★



HALF-LIFE 2

For whatever reason better than *Portal*, *Half-Life 2* doesn't leap off the monitor in any dramatic sense. But we found ourselves repeatedly picking things up and throwing them away though, which was an endlessly pleasing experience. Older games like this certainly show the limits of NVIDIA's 3D tech. ★★★★★



They could save time at swordscompare.com.



Never let a battle get in the way of the latest hat fashions.

MORE WAR SUPERSTAR...

NAPOLEON: TOTAL WAR

ETA
**FEB
2010**

Jon Blyth accidentally dismantles the French empire

DEVELOPER Creative Assembly PUBLISHER SEGA WEBSITE totalwar.com PREVIOUSLY IN... 213

WHO'D HAVE THOUGHT that, just 200 years ago, it was fashionable to hate the French? It's one of the great burdens of having an empire. Poor Napoleon: before declaring himself the Emperor of France, he probably thought back to the time when he was the plucky revolutionary underdog, and all the blokes said "way to go, Naps", and the girls were so keen to make an impression on him that they'd shove their tongues into their cheeks to give the slightly unconvincing impression of oral sex.

But as his delusions of divinity grew – Napoleon came to believe that he was guided by God's hand. And when you start believing that success is pre-ordained by a diety, you're on the fast train to whoopsville. While *Empire* focused on the development of American Independence, over in Europe the story of a military genius was unfolding. But don't start with that Napoleon, the European bogeyman stuff.

GENERAL DWARF

Long before the cartoonists of enemy states began to draw Napoleon as a physically tiny man in a massive bicorne hat, he was a revolutionary soldier, quickly adjusting to his position in the new world by claiming to be the Emperor of it. Fans of *QI* will know that he was physically pretty average. When whole countries start spreading childish rumours about you, you know you're doing something right.

In bringing the exploits of Napoleon to the *Total War* series, Creative Assembly have dealt with it in the same way they've always dealt with reality. Military history is the Plasticine from which they roll out alternative time-snakes. So, Napoleon starts out as he was – a fully-trained artillery commander, commanding an army of artillery-strong, but badly trained soldiers. The new units are true to the time – all 351 of them, created just for

this sequel. But what you do with them is up to you. Napoleon, after all, made mistakes.

This standalone title is, to use Creative Assembly's own words, "*Empire* under a microscope". It takes the same narrative form as *Empire's* Road To Independence campaign that formed the tutorial-



THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Attrition adds new strategy
- ✓ Shorter turn-times
- ✓ New effects and graphics for communication
- ✗ More thinking required
- ✗ Will eat away at your brain and life

Shinier hats, faster horses: that's tech trees for you.



THE STORY SO FAR...
TOTAL WAR



ROME
Featured a bunch of Carthaginians, and loads of dust.

300BC



MEDIEVAL
Spanned three centuries of castle and trebuchets.

11TH CENTURY



SHOGUN
The first *Total War* game, setting CA up for life.

15TH CENTURY



EMPIRE
Naval combat, gunpowder and revolution.

18TH CENTURY



"Hi, I'm Napoleon. They named naps, poles, and the Leon restaurants after me."



ONE

61



Individual animations make for oddly convincing screenshots.

esque segment of *Empire*. Whilst not a tutorial as such, the rise of Napoleon does give CA a chance to introduce you gently, again, to the classic *Total War* blend of turn-based world map strategy and huge real-time battles.

The first campaign sees Napoleon as a General in 1796, commanding an post-revolution French Army.

On the border of Italy and France, the Austrians were the chief enemy of France, and Napoleon had been sent to distract them. He did better than that: he won the war for his country. That's what you're aspiring to, here. And before you claim supreme political power, you get to focus on the combat rather than the minutiae of running an empire.

One of Napoleon's most famous quotes, that conjures a lovely image of breakdancing soldiers invading a country by doing The Caterpillar, is that an army marches on its stomach.

That's the new aspect of *Napoleon*, which brings something to *Total War* that's never been fully acknowledged: the effects of starvation, plague and general attrition on a troop. On the world map, the further your troops are away from home and supplies, and the more hostile the environment, the more their morale and numbers will be whittled away before they've even had a chance to run away, morale shattered, from a battle.

This means scorched earth tactics become a real, and occasionally sensible option, depriving anyone who follows you of the resources you've enjoyed. The Russians have used this tactic to great success, in the past: under Stalin in the 1940, they fought Hitler by moving their factories east, and burning down their own houses. They poisoned their own wells to wear Napoleon down in

1812. Now you can do similar in *Napoleon: Total War*.

Or you can be slightly more proactive, and take advantage of an over-extended army by cutting their supply chain. If they're a long way from home, and haven't planned their advance properly, this could cripple them – just as it crippled Napoleon in 1812. The thoughtful introduction of attrition is a tactical game-changer for the series.

TIME CHANGES

If the idea of fighting a campaign in *Total War* along the border of two countries seems claustrophobic, that's just one reason this is being described as "*Empire* under a microscope" by CA. The other reason is the turn time is reduced from six months to two weeks. This change isn't so trite as to simply mean the calendar moves more slowly – it impacts on your turn-to-turn considerations. You can't just stack up your troops and send them half-way across the planet: now you have to consider the effects of hunger and supplies, and if you decide to take challenging terrain, morale.

The second campaign takes place in Egypt and the Holy Lands. Napoleon's

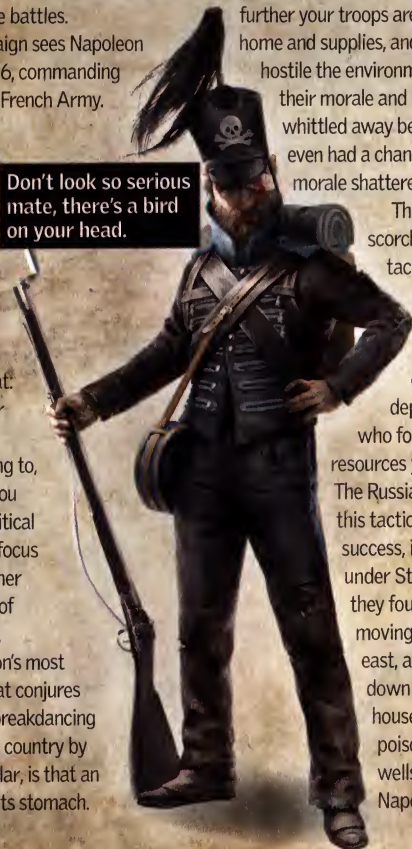


intention here was to disrupt the British trade routes, but his options were limited. He was far from France, with no way of setting up a recruitment queue in Paris and jettling them over to his location in a couple of six-month turns. So here, you're forced to survive locally, build supply depots, and recruit from the residents, using their camel-riders and other units to your advantage.

A camel has two advantages over a horse, I'm told: first, riding from the back lets you use the hump as a shield.

"The introduction of attrition is a game-changer for the series"

Don't look so serious mate, there's a bird on your head.



"Who brought the French flag along?
I was hoping no-one'd know which
side we were on, and ignore us."



After zooming in for an
ogle, you'll want to zoom
out and issue some orders.



Secondly, they're a bit more stupid, and
don't mind running into square formation
pikemen so much. How that helps, I'm
not sure.

DUST DEVILRY

From a screenshot, the graphics will look
virtually identical to *Empire*. But there
have been improvements. On the desert
level, a heat shimmer warps the screen
gently. It's not purely cosmetic – it's a
visual reminder that you're in a hostile
environment, and likely to be suffering
from fatigue and thirst. A renovated
particle engine throws dust into the air:
a wind direction that has been set at the
beginning of the level carries it slowly



It's still the age of
gunpowder – watch out
for rainy weather.

over the map. If you remember the build
up to *Empire*, there was a lot of fuss
about every bullet being individually
calculated – every naval cannonball
causing individual damage.

That perfectionist fuss is continued
here – the dust kicked up may look like
a cosmetic effect, but it will affect the
visibility of troops. If something looks like
it would have an effect on the battle, it

almost certainly will. Even the new
individual troop animations aren't
entirely functionless. Not only do they
break up the uniformity of the battle,
making it tempting to zoom fully in and
follow an individual on the battlefield,
they also give you feedback. When
cavalrymen rear up against pikemen in
the square formation, they're giving you
the important message that horses hate

THE 18TH CENTURY STATE OF EUROPE

The six big players in late 18th Century
Europe will be familiar to anyone who's
played *Empire*, or a fan of Napoleon's
cheeky exploits. But here's an update.

1 Britain, that strange and excellent
speck in the ocean, relies on ruling
the waves and superior
moustache twitching to
extend its influence
around the globe.



2 Prussia has recently benefited
from losing a leader called
Frederick, who was best known for
saying "Don't call me
Frederick, it makes if
sound like you're telling
me off".



3 The Ottoman Empire is all but
over, its legacy soon to be distilled
into a form of furniture
that people will never
really use or understand.



4 The Russian Empire
is fearless, ruthless,
and numbers many.



5 Meanwhile the beleaguered
Austrians fear
France since Napoleon
kicked their arses along
the Italian border.



6 This leaves **France**: vast, mighty,
and if you're playing
any of the other factions...
ripe for a punch-up.



approaching geometric arrangements
of spikes.

Often, you'll see a dead cavalryman,
an ankle snagged in his stirrup, getting
dragged across the ground. That one's
fairly pointless, admittedly, but it's
understated. CA are keen to make their
game make visual sense, and use
as much as possible to show, not
tell, the player what's going on.



➤ But they're far from mirthless – the joy that's expressed at a dead man getting dragged by a terrified horse across a battlefield speaks volumes.

TWEAKS AND CHANGES

This is a period in which Napoleon suffered a defeat – giving you the chance to prove that you're only one massive army away from world domination. Another visual improvements is the deformable terrain – cannonballs now leave marks in the ground. It's not a battlefield tactic – artillery wasn't big enough to leave huge craters – but along with the particle effects, it all adds up to make the battle feel that much more real.

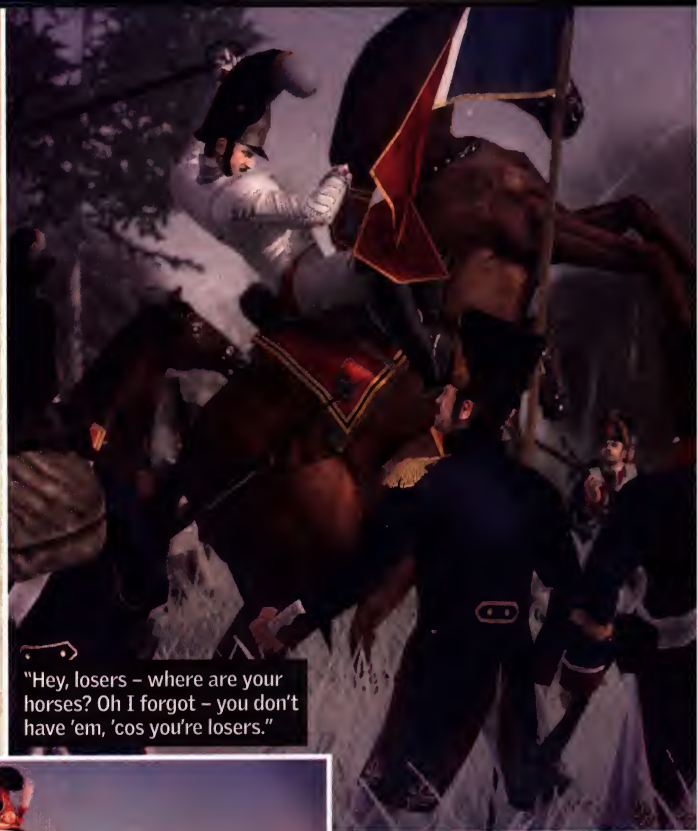
A UI tweak now displays a blue ring that displays the area of effect for commander abilities such as Inspiration and Rally, that can boost troop morale. Rally can even bring your troops back from Empire's new shattered rating.

However well you finish the campaign, though, the next one will snap your progress to the historical timeline. Allowing your bonus world tour to persist would imbalance the campaign, and eliminate any attempt to seriously recreate Napoleon's rise to power.

Over in the AI department, the renovations made in *Empire* have been built upon. Avid readers with steel-trap memories will recall the move from a chess-based consideration of possible

moves, to a to-do list. The computer keeps in mind a prioritised set of goals, with every action ranked on how likely it was to achieve any of them.

The refinements are minor, but interesting in a bookwormish kind of way. For instance now, the AI will consider how a goal's coming along. If it's finding itself unable to achieve something, and the goal isn't something as fundamental as a victory condition, the electronic brain will reprioritise it, and focus on something more likely to bear fruit. If the idea of putting human thought into code gives you a tremor in that secret part of you that you prefer to keep hidden from the cool kids, then you'd probably guff



"Hey, losers – where are your horses? Oh I forgot – you don't have 'em, 'cos you're losers."



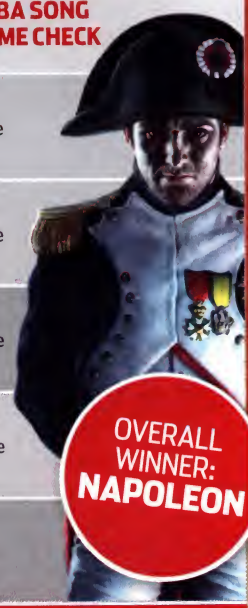
Horse, sword and hat – this shot's got the lot.




Artillery – Napoleon's field of expertise.

WHOSE EMPIRE WAS THE BEST?

NAME	AGE OF DEATH	FAVOURITE STRATEGY	BEST QUOTE	POPULAR MISCONCEPTION	ABBA SONG NAME CHECK
ALEXANDER 	33	Deceptive strategy, creating a phantom threat.	"Heaven cannot brook two suns, nor earth two masters."	His full title was Alexander the Great – not Alexander, They're Grrreat!	None
ATTILA THE HUN 	47	Ride a horse, shoot arrows, hit hard and run away.	Didn't say much really.	Attila was a nice humble sort, according to a Roman historian. But he may have been made to say that.	None
HITLER 	56	Storm in, make a mess, then blame it on the Jews.	That one in <i>Downfall</i> about being banned from Xbox Live.	His number of testes was unknown, but it was between none and two. One was chosen as a compromise.	None
JESUS 	33	Throwing tables around, banging on about his dad.	"If you don't stop fighting I'm turning this car around and we're going home."	The plastic God-Jesus robot toy available in Japan contains very little real Jesus parts.	None
NAPOLEON 	51	Concealing troops, attacking two forces at their hinge.	"England is a nation of shopkeepers."	OK, so 5' 2" is pretty short, but everyone was shorter back then. By 2300, we'll all be 7' 2". Or dead.	One
WINNER	HITLER	JESUS	NAPOLEON (everyone likes shopping)	ATTILA THE HUN	NAPOLEON





"Just us two left.
Settle it with a
thumb war?"

One new unit – there
are 350 others.

"The Napoleon campaign looks set to be the most realistic yet"

yourself into space if you saw the numbers at work behind the scenes.

Because that's what the third and final campaign is about: the crash zoom out to the world map, the blue empire squatting over the chest of Europe, with more than a couple of fingers in Africa. Now, you're playing a more familiar game. Not as global as *Empire*, but with all the old concerns of taxes, the containment of unrest, and the movement of agents. If that's not to your taste, you can always automate the micromanagement for a small cut in efficiency.

REAL WAR

The stylish Rake has gone, so there's no point building bawdy houses – but the age of the true Gentleman appears to have ended: he now takes on more rake-like behaviour. During one duel cutscene, a gentleman flees, to be gunned down by his opponent. Meanwhile, to fulfil those covert pursuits, the spy makes a return.

This affects the settlements – there's no point dropping brothels everywhere when they don't attract rakes – and the supply depots are vital, of course. This means a growing responsibility, in terms of setting taxes, keeping the rabble happy. But as usual with *Total War*, you can limit your involvement in these money-minded matters, and suffer the slightly (and deliberately) inefficient

decisions of the AI, to keep your game simple and streamlined. You'll lose around 5% of your optimal income, but that's the price of an easy life.

Napoleon's charismatic and legendary life ran from 1769 to 1821, making it a perfect way to extend *Empire*'s remit of the 18th Century. The change in zoom level and the narrative of the campaign make it yet another *Total War* game that gives you a feel for an era, without ever going so far as to educate you. The amount of military knowledge knocking around in the Horsham HQ is formidable, but Creative Assembly aren't history teachers – they're game-makers.

This is a busy time for them. The *Warpath* expansion for *Empire* will build a deeper, narrative storyline into the story of the Native American tribes who formed a large part of the first battle in *The Road to Independence*. They're also releasing the multiplayer patch for the *Empire* campaign (page 36).

With a deeper attention to the ways in which soldiers find themselves dying, the more intimate, up-close *Napoleon* campaign looks set to be the most realistic yet. It's not like *Total War* was ever the most whimsical, throwaway series – but if they keep getting closer to the real experience of war, they might as well sell the game with a post-traumatic disorder counselling course. **PCZ**

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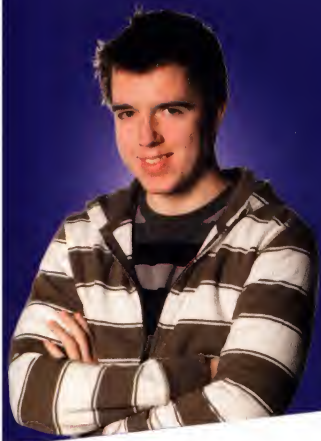


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PCZONE Reviews

Our verdict on the
latest PC games

OPTIMISM

D **RAGON AGE: ORIGINS** finally came along then. You can walk into shops and it'll be there on the shelf, utterly released.

Despite it happening over and over again, it's always odd to see games you've been looking forward to for months appearing next to copies of *Battlefield 2142*. It's hard to think of a time when we anticipated *Battlefield 2142*. Sod off, *Battlefield 2142*.

It'll happen again too. One day *Left 4 Dead 2* will be out, and six months after that we'll all have shut up about it. Games we haven't even begun to be excited about, they too will eventually be reviewed, released, absorbed and discarded. Somebody will have to write a *Half-Life 3* retrospective at some point. As we tumble into the future, everything of the past is compressed into a vanishing dot on a timeline. How many people do you suppose, right now, are playing *Manic Miner*? That many people will be playing *Counter-Strike: Source* the day after you die.

Still though, can't wait for *Mafia II*. It looks ace!

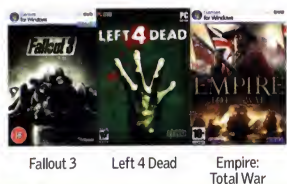
Steve Hogarty

Steve Hogarty
Deputy editor

**MUST
BUYS!**



PC ZONE Classics are hard to come by, and when you see one you should drop to the floor and refuse to move until someone buys you the game...



Fallout 3 Left 4 Dead Empire: Total War

**PCZONE
SWEARS...**

68

DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS

Will this be the *Baldur's Gate* of this decade?
Or is it just sex, violence and nothing else?

THE PC ZONE BADGES



CLASSIC
(90%+)

Games scoring in this bracket are air-punching, heart-soaring triumphs. Buy them.



RECOMMENDED
(75-89%)

Head-turning, if not eye-popping, games. But then, who wants their eyes popped?



DUMP
(0-19%)

PC ZONE's dirty protest. If a game is bad, we won't shirk our duty.



ONLINE ONLY
Don't have an internet connection? Then you're wasting your time with this game.



EXPANSION PACK
See this and you're going to have to get the original to play the expansion. We know - life's not fair.



ON THE DVD
Good news! Check out the cover DVD for a playable demo or movie.

THE PC ZONE GAMING MACHINE

As you'll see on the many pages of resplendent reviews that follow, we list the minimum specifications you need to play each game in each review. Please refer to the publisher's website to check out their recommended optimum specs that'll make the games super-whizzy. We review all new games on a variety of systems, including our top-spec, very desirable Xworks X81-C2D, (pictured right). For more info on Xworks, tap into the wonder that is the internet and type the following selection of letters into your browser: xworksinteractive.com.



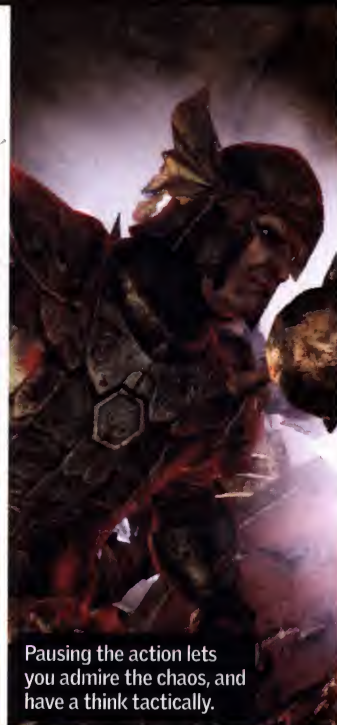
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Will this multiplayer city builder revolutionise online gaming?
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"Gepetto! Are you down there?"



Pausing the action lets you admire the chaos, and have a think tactically.



Lovely elf.

DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS

Will Porter beheads and beds a bunch of faery folk

DEVELOPER BioWare
PUBLISHER EA
WEBSITE dragonage.
bioware.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99



AT A GLANCE...

The West's greatest RPG crafters return to their fantasy roots with a tale that's epic, magisterial, dark, beautiful and heavy on the side-boobs.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
2.2GHz processor, 1.5GB RAM, and a 256MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS **93%**

MASS EFFECT **92%**

THE WITCHER **88%**

SOMETHING STRANGE IS happening to me, and I hope you don't feel it rude if I share a little. I've developed a total boy-crush on a friend called Alistair. I haven't told him, as dialogue hasn't opened that up as an option, but he's probably worked it out as I take him everywhere I go. I equip him with all the best weaponry, I make sure he's satisfactorily buffed at all times... hell, I just like being around him.

Say me and my gang are wandering through the Blight-ravaged wilderness and Alistair is cracking a joke with my other pals – good-girl paladin-type Leliana, and vampish side-boob witch Morrigan – even though we're in the middle of nowhere I just turn around to watch him. I often don't equip him with a helmet just so I can see his face. Oh Alistair, be mine forever. When this business with the darkspawn is over, why don't we buy a cottage in the Ferelden countryside and hang out all the time?

I'm sure it's OK though. These nascent psychological stirrings can only have been prompted by the fact that *Dragon Age: Origins* has some of the best realised characters, greatest storylines and most natural free-flowing dialogue ever ladled onto a PC's hard drive. In other games you hammer the keyboard to cycle

through the chit-chat to get back into the action, in *Dragon Age* when you strike up a conversation you settle back in your chair and turn up the volume. BioWare have taken the complexities, bottomless depth and sheer epic nature of their early RPGs and mixed in the wit, pace, and mind-bogglingly threaded and context-sensitive dialogue of their later *Knights of the Old Republic* and *Mass Effect* to astounding effect.

TOLKIEN DETAIL

The land of Ferelden feels real to the touch, so layered is it in history and so plagued by political and racial turmoil. As a fantasy world it's up there on a par with that of *The Lord of The Rings* setting. In fact the whole piece feels like a Dorian Gray portrait of Middle-Earth – a familiar landscape tinged with an extra darkness, abused power and intolerance.

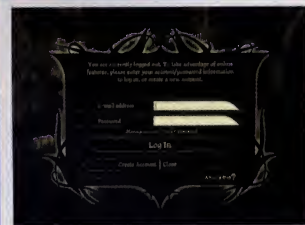
In other news, I also recently had sex with a male dwarf prostitute. He made groaning noises I won't forget in a hurry, but I'm fairly sure it doesn't mean I've made a major lifestyle decision if I remembered to reload my last quicksave. Which I think I did.





CASH 4 GOLD!

Premium downloadable
quests up for the taking



Dragon Age contains quest-givers that provide interesting quests and loot. But you must pay for this stuff and download it using an EA account.

In any other game I'd be wound up, but there's such a wealth of content in *Dragon Age* that it's not worth working up a sweat about it. And all this DLC will be available as soon as the game's released, which can only be good.

My only real concern is that when you come across these boundary-crossing NPCs you get snapped out of the game, and realise that you're not actually saving the world, it's 2am and you have to get to work in a few hours.

**"The whole piece
feels like a Dorian
Gray portrait of
Middle-Earth"**

Characters get splattered
with blood after big battles.
They don't seem to mind.

Statistically ginger hair
appears too often. It is
a fantasy though.



➤ Let's start at the start though. Once you've selected your character, played around with their facial features, class and what-not you gallivant off into one of six separate two and a half hour(ish) prologues detailing your character's last traumatic experiences of his/her former life.

Whether you're a posh dwarf, a common dwarf, a mage, a City Elf, a noble human or a Dalish elf hiding out in the forest, no-one gets it particularly easy. It's in these origin tales that BioWare begin as they mean to go on – covering themes of racial intolerance, power hunger, and institutional oppression, while spicing each one up with topics like child murder and gang-rape. Ferelden is far from a happy land of faerie-folk.

BIRTH OF HEROES

These origins work brilliantly, not only as individual cases of playable lore but also in personalising the 70+ hours of game-time ahead of you. As you play through the game your origins are meshed with the overall narrative thrust of the game to such an extent that you struggle to imagine what would be happening to someone with a different background. It's also fascinating when origin NPCs have a life beyond these beginning tales.

There's one, for example, that the Mage character encounters during his grand entrance in the Tower of the Circle of Magi. The same chap will then pop up 40 hours later (maybe less, maybe more) as an important plot NPC. To the magic-wielder he's already an interesting and deep character you'll have established trust issues with, but to everyone else he's a blank sheet.

This is an effect redoubled when the main storyline brings you back to the origin tale's former haunts. For a sixth of players this means revisiting old friends and enemies that are still afflicted by



Large enemies are genuinely worrying – ogres dish out some serious pain.

your former decisions, but for everyone else it's a trip to a strange new culture of which they have very little knowledge. It's a fantastic, mind-boggling and brilliant concept.

Come the end of your hellish deliverance into the world of Ferelden (seriously, try the Human Noble origin – 'dark' isn't the word) and you're soon collected by Duncan, a roaming talent scout. Dunc is a Grey Warden – and he wants you to join their dwindling number.

The Grey Wardens are a group of warriors who act as a safeguard against the Blight – militaristic and plague-like stirrings of the undead, prompted by machinations below ground in the Deep



Duncan Dares. He dares loads.



The City Elf Origin tale begins with an arranged marriage. And gets steadily darker.



There are, indeed, dragons. Several of them in fact.



The Breclian Forest: Quiet, peaceful, serene.

Roads – that spreads every 500 years or so. You travel to the city of Ostagar, where a young naïve king and his grizzled general are about to face down the horde once and for all and your help is needed. As to what happens next, well the 80 or so hours of Blight-stomping that remain make it clear that it isn't a total success.

It is at this point that the adventure begins to pull in different directions. The land of Ferelden needs to be united against the Blight – so your band of travelling death-bringers must visit the beleaguered humans of Redcliffe, the secretive Dalish elves, the bickering caste-split Dwarfes, and tower-bound Mages and sign them up to an alliance. It's like being one of those clipboard-wielders who knock on people's doors asking them to change power suppliers. Only you're met with kingship disputes, escaped demons, possessed children, werewolves, dragons, and armies of the undead instead of confused pensioners.

All the while there are a barrage of side-quests, random encounters, class



Alright lover?

specific mission-givers, smaller towns and the sprawling city of Denerim to live, love and level through should you wish to meander away from the branching main quest and occasional 'Meanwhile!' plot sequences that play out as you journey around the map.

On a surface level *Dragon Age's* world has the same format as Tolkien's (Deep Roads can be interchanged for the Mines of Moria, Ostagar with Helm's Deep etc.) but the fabric of the land is entirely different, and the game plays with your familiarity and expectation of what you'll find in each.

But enough of this postcard-scribbling, let's talk about how it plays.

"As for what you all get up to, it's somewhat RPG business as usual"

FIRE SIDE CHATS...

The friendly faces who hang around your campfire

On your travels you could also come across a grumpy Klingon-esque foreign warrior, a heal-y type mage, a permanently pissed Dwarf and a bi-curious Elf assassin – but let's leave them with only slightly soiled spoiler tags. The initial Grey Warden gang, which runs in a fashion not a million miles away from the gang headed up by *Top Cat*, is comprised of the following roleplay starlets.



MORRIGAN

Daughter of Flemeth, ancient witch of the wilds, you'll come to rely upon Morrigan for her magical skills if you're a warrior or rogue. Disdainful of everything, but with a heart somewhere deep down if you go looking (maybe) her Palpatine-style electric attacks, cones of ice, and shapeshifting abilities are more than handy in a scrap. And she hates everyone else, especially Leliana and Alistair.



ALISTAIR

Brilliantly voiced, fun to be around and an in-game best mate. Alistair is the most fully-rounded NPC that BioWare have ever created. With an intriguing royal past and a career in the magic-hunting Chantry he's an interesting, conflicted chap – and you'll feel pangs of longing for him should he ever be bumped out of your questing roster. He hates magic, and as such is at odds with Morrigan.



WOOFMONSTER

You can name your character's dog, a Ferelden warhound, anything you wish. In truth, although he's handy in a fight, you probably won't take him out into the fray too much simply because he's not too chatty, and it seems a waste. This said, he's such a great representation of a real (if over-intelligent) mutt that he steals every scene he's in. He likes everyone. Especially you.



LELIANA

A rogue bard from the neighbouring land of Orlesia, Leliana is the very definition of sweetness and light – and a firm believer in the Chant of Light religion to boot. Slightly irritating at first, her silly lilting accent soon starts to grow on you, presumably because it's made clear that she fancies you rotten. Seeing as she's all about faith and belief, she's always at odds with Morrigan.

You generally view affairs from a third-person view – and the control scheme isn't a million miles off either. If you're feeling more old-school however you can pull back to a top-down isometric-like viewpoint, while the action can be frozen at any point so if you want a greater feeling of tactical nuance and a taste of the turn-based RPGs of old then it can certainly be attained.

MAGES RULE

You'll have three followers trail around after you *KOTOR*-style once your roster starts filling up (chosen round the campfire you can retreat to as you journey around the map) and during combat can leap into their bodies to deliver orders through clicks of your enemies and taps on the quick-command bar.

Alternatively friendly NPCs can be left to their own devices, following tactical orders that you've prearranged in a hugely customisable (almost too hugely customisable) table of 'If X then Y' commands.

As for what you all get up to, it's somewhat RPG business as usual. Rogues favour sneaking in under the radar with poisoned blades for some stealthy backstabs with freshly laid traps in their wake, warriors wade in with double-handed weapons or with shields poised to bash, Mages rend their air with frozen, fiery and electrical pain. It all works an absolute treat, but a special mention must be reserved for the magic use – it's magnificent.

In other RPGs I've steered clear of magical characters, as their low-visual impact fireballs

REVIEWS DRAGONAGE: ORIGINS

and vials of blue magical stuff have never done anything for me. But in *Dragon Age* magic is a dirty, visceral and brilliant thing. I habitually play as a rogue, but as soon as Morrigan and Leliana showed up then I didn't keep them around for the pillow talk alone.

GETTING BETTER

Levelling for yourself and your cronies happens regularly, with three points on offer for your base-line stats, a core talent advance every two levels, and an extra ability from various skill-branches to slot into your battle tactics every time. It's a great system that's simple to understand, and brilliantly the companions you leave behind level up while you're away, meaning that you never feel like you're spinning NPC plates and walking out with weak characters who haven't had their engine ticking over.

Further specialisation kicks in 20 or so hours in, when you hit a level where you can refine your class one of four ways with a bought book or a compliant NPC trainer (see 'Specialist Tastes'), although many of your companions come with a recent visit to the career's advisor indelibly marked on their character.

Chit-chat between your friends happens ambiently as you move through Ferelden, while they also chip into your

conversations with withering put-downs and/or compliant happy-speak as you persuade, intimidate, praise and attempt to bed the general populace.

Should you wish to get to know your charges better though then you'll find yourself spending a lot of time in your campsite. The conversations you have here are nothing short of magisterially written, and relationships within your travelling band of warriors quickly go beyond love triangles and into the realms of a love prism. The very best and funniest of the interactions you can have though are reserved for those with your faithful hound, since despite its darkness there's a lot of light relief in *Dragon Age*.

Depending on how you treat them, and the solutions you choose to the various moral quandaries you come across, your buddies' opinions of you, and your chances of having any sexy time a few days of gameplay down the line, will raise and lower. Really piss someone off though (like Morrigan the side-boob witch who'll get a right strop on if you're out spreading niceness) and you can always bring them back on-side with a carefully chosen gift. Fail to cultivate a relationship and piss someone off and they'll pick a fight or bugger off.

Where *Dragon Age* triumphs though is that the rinse-and-repeat cycle of foe-slaying, loot plundering, level upping and character fiddling is addictive in the extreme – easily matching the great strides that BioWare have made in dialogue and narrative. It's a handy reviewer stock-in-trade phrase to churn out, but over the past few weeks on average I've lost out on two hours of sleep every night, through thinking I'll



Glowing red? Soon you'll be dead.

"BioWare have secured their position as masters of the RPG art"

just boot up *Dragon Age* to have a few campfire chats, fiddle with some inventories, craft some traps and poisons, then head off into a nearby dungeon.

FANTASY, IMPERFECT

All this from someone who never really got on with *Diablo*, and backed away from *World of Warcraft* when everything got a little bit +3 Greaves of Frightening. A sense of time and place is lost. Ferelden becomes everything.

Is it perfect? Well, no. For one, the difficulty levels are all over the shop – engaging as the tactical combat is, on the normal difficulty levels you'll come

across areas where you'll be wiped out repeatedly. The game just isn't balanced that well, and some rooms will unduly punish you and completely wreck the flow of your adventures – not least because auto-saves aren't as frequent as they might be. My advice, and I've never said this before, is to ratchet the difficulty levels down to easy as soon as you start getting into trouble (which will be guaranteed in the room with the central fire in the Tower of Ishal).

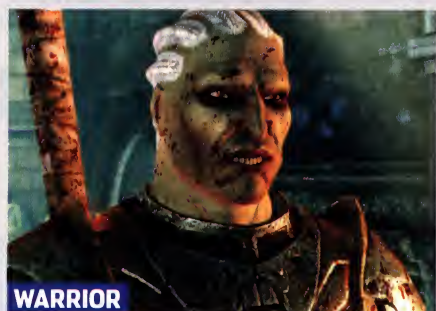
Otherwise, and I'm getting picknicky here, I assume that it's *Dragon Age*'s long-in-the-tooth development that has led to its



Demonic sorts are beautifully imagined.

SPECIALIST TASTES

A run-down of the various ways you can take your character once you hit level 7



WARRIOR

Beserker: Slinky combat movements are replaced with slashes of pure blind rage.

Champion: A leader among soldiers, intimidating foes with precise and co-ordinated combat.

Reaver: A dark speciality. Reavers eat the souls of the dead to heal, and use flowing blood as devastating attacks. Probably not cheerful folk.

Templar: Templars are magic-resistant chaps, born to combat the fireballs of the arcane.



MAGE

Arcane Warrior: This allows magic-users to channel their talents into giving them access to weapons and armour.

Blood Mage: A taboo brand of magic, where your character's health is converted into destruction alongside his mana.

Shapeshifter: Lets you turn into spiders, bears... lots of stuff with poison and claws.

Spirit Healer: The most boring, yet most necessary, speciality of all.



ROGUE

Assassin: Turns you into a master of concocting poison and pulling off speedy, efficient kills.

Bard: Through a strum of a lyre Bards can inspire your party, or demoralise foes.

Duelist: Further improving the already heightened reflexes of the rogue, Duelists do like a spot of swordplay.

Ranger: Rangers are a friend to the animals. And as such can call upon the wilds to help. Like in those old *Godzilla* Saturday morning cartoons.



Combat is great, but just too hard.

Enemies are dynamic and have moves so unexpected they're unheard of in other RPGs.

environments sometimes feeling a little drab and boxy. You just rarely get a true sense of the epic when invisible walls make a surprise reappearance. It's a minor incursion on *Dragon Age's* all-out assault on greatness, and in outdoor environments it's far less of a problem, but it's easily the part of the game that lags furthest behind.

Overall though *Dragon Age: Origins* is a brave and brutal return to form for PC fantasy roleplaying – bettering nearest rival *The Witcher* through both its combat and the innate lovability of so many of its characters. To commit yourself to the Grey Wardens is to offer up a large chunk of the coming months to the levelling god in the sky – but as you do so you'll laugh, you'll get dewy-eyed, your jaw will drop heavily and often, and you may even get off with a sexy witch.

With *Dragon Age: Origins* BioWare have secured their position as masters of the RPG art, and one can only imagine the wonders they're concocting in *Star Wars: The Old Republic*. Until then though, I'll be replaying *Dragon Age*. Yomping through the Ferelden Hills with Alistair. Together forever. **PCZ**



The Dalish Elves are proud renegades. But they've got a problem with werewolves.



Less *Scooby Doo* than it looks.

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Beautiful close-up, but lacks epic

SOUND Amazing music, great voice-acting

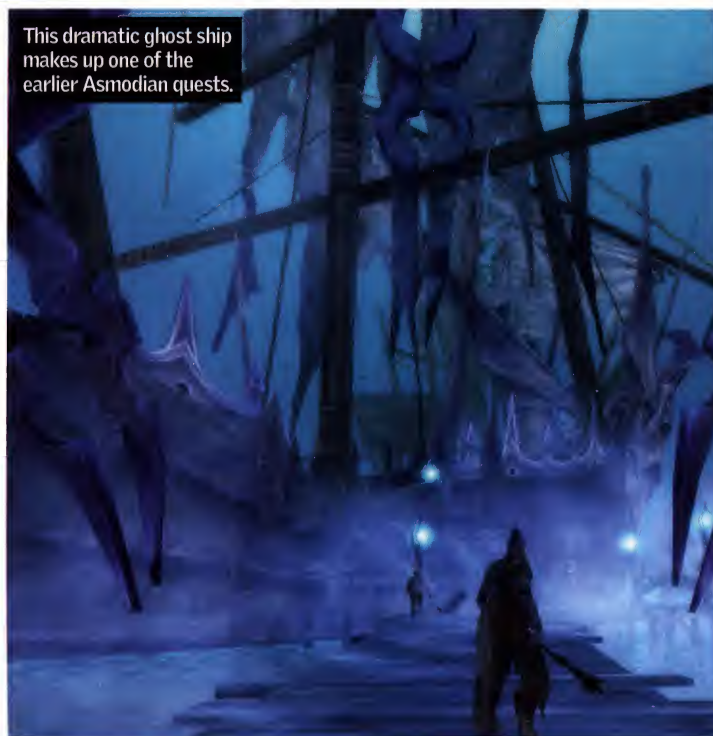
MULTIPLAYER Not really, sadly

- ✓ Fascinating fantasy world
- ✓ Entertaining companions
- ✓ Stellar twisting, turning storyline
- ✓ Addictive character development
- ✗ Difficulty all over the place

93

A roleplaying masterclass

This dramatic ghost ship makes up one of the earlier Asmodian quests.



Beats griffons, for sure.



AION: THE TOWER OF ETERNITY



Adam Glick spreads his wings and prepares to grind

DEVELOPER NCsoft
PUBLISHER NCsoft
WEBSITE uk.aiononline.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99 (30 days free, £8.99/month afterwards)

AT A GLANCE...

Flashy by-the-numbers Korean MMORPG with a hint of *World of Warcraft*, but with a large-scale grind and heavy focus on PvP.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
Pentium 4 2.8GHz or AMD Athlon 2800+ processor, 1GB RAM, and a GeForce 6600 or Radeon X1550 graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

WORLD OF WARCRAFT 95%

AION 80%

FINAL FANTASY XI 67%

THE CAUSTIC GRIND-CULTURE of the Korean MMO market has never gelled with a European audience. While the *Lineage* games had their champions over here, even we egalitarian gamers couldn't stomach having a second job levelling a moon elf. Imagine my surprise when, four hours into *Aion*, I found myself genuinely enjoying the experience – not in a belaboured 'this isn't awful' manner, but with the true, itchy addiction of a solid online slasher.

FROM THE EAST

Though it has the hallmarks of seemingly every MMORPG released in Korea – sexy elves, fan fiction-quality writing, and effeminate swordsmen – *Aion* also has many of the things that make *World of Warcraft* such a success.

In fact, much of *Aion* screams of a unity between the East and West, or at least that someone on the development team from day one had been taking extensive notes from Blizzard's work. Though the grind itself is still present, the

brutality of the curve has been remarkably softened. Whether this is a purely psychological effect, or from the gameplay design, isn't totally obvious, but NCsoft have done their part to spread quests across



If only *WOW* looked this good.

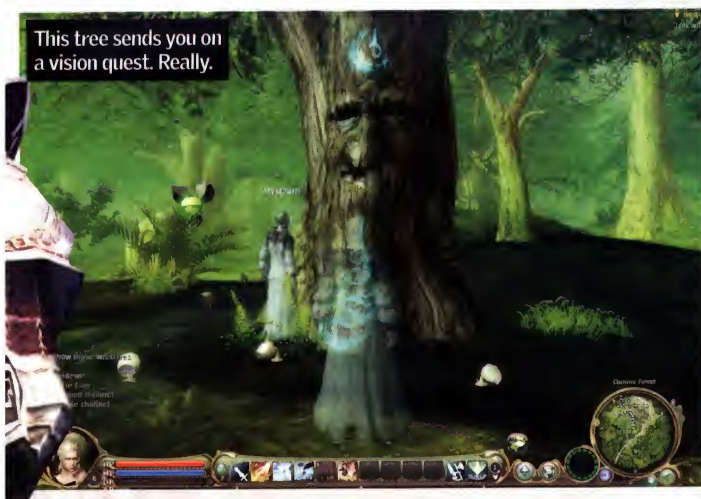
"It's my sister, my brother, my sister, my brother. Hell, how should I know?"



Clubbing cat-men to death is all part of MMOs.



The sword of King Arthur. The wings of an angel. The body of Posh Spice.



This tree sends you on a vision quest. Really.

"The difference is... the bizarre addition of players having wings"

the gamut of levels to the point that it's much more of an adventure than a slog.

There're two races – the Elyos and the Asmodians. The former are the goody-goody human/elf type people, and the latter some kind of weird mixture of brutish mole-people and fruity dark elves. The plot centres around taking control of the broken world of Ateia, which was torn asunder in a former conflict with the Balaur, leaving one side beautiful and serene and the other shrouded in darkness. Your character is one of the original warriors fighting in

the Abyss, and over the course of the campaign will rediscover his (or her) true potential as a Daeva – one of the magical legionnaires for either side.

WINGS OF DESIRE

Flowery story aside, *Aion*'s still a generic MMO. You pick a class that does damage either from a distance or up close using a variety of attacks activated by pressing the number keys.

Aion changes this up by having a number of chain abilities – meaning one triggers the other. For example, my warrior character could trigger his main ferocious strike ability, and either lead move into an attack that would cause yet



Internet police! Stop where you are!

more damage, or have raised his damage over the next minute and protect him from some. It's a simple and effective system, if not terribly inventive, and succeeds in making *Aion* a snug fit for anybody who's played any other MMORPG released since *EverQuest*.

However, it may also immediately turn off those tired with *WOW* or *Lord of the Rings Online*'s gameplay, because it's unapologetically similar. In fact, just about every generic hallmark is present – kill quests, loot quests, running about to deliver stuff, gathering herbs and ore to make things, and so on and so forth.

The difference, at least in NCsoft's eyes, is both the focus on PvPvE – a confusing acronym, referring to players killing enemies controlled by both their peers and *Aion*'s AI – and the bizarre addition of players having... well... wings.

When you reach level nine, you begin an 'Ascension Quest', which is Korean for "lots of running between places". The said quest allows you to branch off from the initial class paths – Mage, Warrior, Scout and Priest – to specialise in particular areas (see 'Up, Up and Away'). You also gain a weird pair of angel wings and become a Daeva.



UP, UP AND AWAY

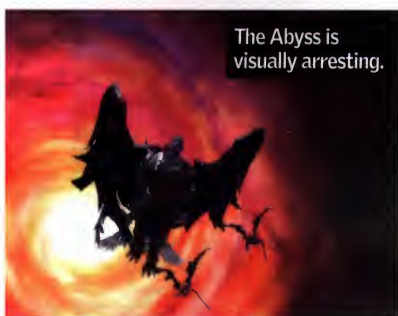
The ascension class-system in all its winged mudanity

Aion's class system is a much-simplified version of *EverQuest II's*. Once you reach level nine, you begin a quest that levels you to 10, you ascend (get wings) and specialise. If you pick a mage, you can become either a Sorcerer (damage-dealing wizard) or a Spiritmaster (summoner of pets).

If you pick a Priest, you can become a Charter (buff-provider) or Cleric (healer). Scouts become Rangers (bow-and-arrow damage dealer) or Rogues (stealth-damage fiend). Warriors are the most boring, become either a Gladiator (damage-dealer) or a Templar (average meat-shield). It's not exactly rocket science.



The Abyss is visually arresting.



areas, if not enough to justify it being a key selling point in the game until you reach, at level 50, the Abyss.

This gigantic PvP area is made up of islands – like Outland from *WOW* but less static – that you fly between. Clashes take place both in the sky and on the ground against the Balaur and your opposing side, and you can gain Abyss points (which can be traded for items, much like *WOW's* honour system – are you seeing a trend here?) for kills and castle captures.

While we only spent brief moments in the Abyss so far, the verdict on it is simple: when it has full forces doing battle and really utilising everything it has to offer, the Abyss will be excellent. However, in the same way that *Warhammer Online's* public quests require reliable streams of dedicated players to be remotely enjoyable, the Abyss will require both

"The only problem is *Aion* lacks anything that screams 'PLAY ME!'"

sides to be likeminded in their aggression and strategy.

ALMOST THERE

The rest of the game is beautiful, addictive and well-balanced, presented palatably and with constant, satisfying rewards. What it lacks in a killer license it makes up for in tasteful art design and some stunning visuals. PR gobbledygook aside, *Aion* simply looks better than most of the competition, and yet it runs stunningly at every option on full on a rig that stutters, albeit occasionally, with *Champions Online* and *EverQuest II*.

There's a lot to be said for how well everything connects together, too – every quest-giver and the area in which every monster roams

is locatable from the quest screen and on the mini-map, with enough mystery left to make the game still, well, a game.

In fact, the only problem is, regardless of it being a tight, fun, addictive grind, *Aion* lacks anything that really screams "PLAY ME!". Combat is crisp and enjoyable, but not exhilarating. It's graphically stunning, but not memorable. The Abyss PvP is cool, but not amazing. Even the soundtrack is an improvement over the usual terrible jazz-trance-pop that Korean MMOs usually use.

In short, every care has been made to make this a game that anyone from any region will enjoy. However, there just isn't that intangible harmony nor inset differentiation that the game would need to compete with *WOW* – and that's a shame, because otherwise, *Aion* is damn good at what it does. **PCZ**

Skinny man. Big weapon. Heavy armor. Yep, this is an Eastern RPG alright.



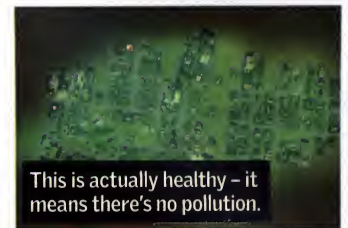
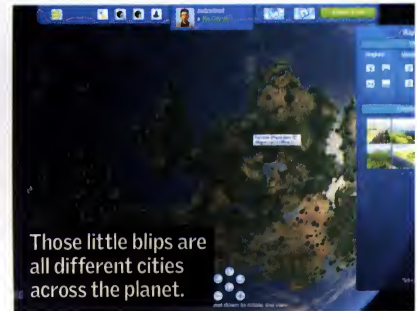
PCZONE

GRAPHICS Lush, Asian feel
SOUND Bad voices, great rock/opera music
MULTIPLAYER It's an MMO

- ✓ Graphically stunning
- ✓ Fun and addictive
- ✓ PvPvE is intriguing
- ✗ Abyss hinges on player base
- ✗ Nothing vastly different
- ✗ Grind is still present

80

Polished not evolutionary



CITIES XL

Adam Glick discovers why he never should be Prime Minister

DEVELOPER Namco Bandai
PUBLISHER Monte Cristo
WEBSITE citiesxl.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99
(£6.50 a month subscription)

LIKE A TRAMP thrusting his crotch at you while singing Katy Perry, *Cities XL* makes a bad first impression. It's a real-time city-builder that has the management of *Civilization* and the presentation of a Crayola-penned *Watchmen*. This doesn't mean it isn't fun, it's just hard to sink the initial hours into.

You build a city by filling it with four levels of workers – unqualified, qualified, executives and elites – and building them a workplace and amenities. This fast becomes complex as you build the city's infrastructure, providing services, making sure the environment doesn't go to shit, and try to keep everyone happy. You can zoom in and walk around the cities – which is all good until you notice they all look the same and a bit rubbish.

You'll also want to build up stockpiles of trade resources like oil and water. These can be traded with the AI-driven OmniCorp or other players, if you pay the subscription fee. This is tough to justify unless you intend to sink hours and hours into *Cities XL*, build sprawling metropolises, and socialise with players.

The saddest point about *Cities XL* is that it's a sound, addictive, at times



attractive, city builder beneath layers of bad decisions. The MMO ideas are good on paper, but you can only text chat, there's no meeting area for the avatars, and few incentives to work together. And the subscription isn't that good: new buildings and resources, updates, and a 35% reduction on expansions isn't worth the fee.

Finally, there's also too much going on for the UI. Balancing budgets, the needs of four classes, resources, pollution and the rest of a city's rigmarole becomes a bit of a headache.

All the same, *Cities XL* does have some pleasure to eek from it. It's just tough to get to, and we can't, at present, recommend subscribing. However, it may be worth a shot if you're itching to create your very own dystopian future. **PCZ**

AT A GLANCE...

Makeshift yet bizarrely addictive *SimCity* clone with online options. Yet not enough to make it an MMO.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
1.86GHz dual core processor, 2GB RAM, and a 128MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

CITY LIFE 2008 **74%**

CITIES XL **66%**

SIMCITY SOCIETIES **61%**

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Cartoonish avatars, crisp cityscapes
SOUND Weird jazz plus orchestras
MULTIPLAYER Kind of

- ✓ Addictive city building
- ✓ Surprisingly satisfying
- ✗ Terrible presentation
- ✗ Some menus still French
- ✗ No real social element

66
More medium than XL

REVIEW TROPICO 3

Trees and mountains and stuff.



TROPICO 3

Dan Marshall's not the sort of maniac you want in charge

DEVELOPER Haemimont Games
PUBLISHER Kalypso Media
WEBSITE tropico3.com
ETA 6 Nov
PRICE £29.99

AT A GLANCE...

Seize control of a banana republic with endless micromanagement and plenty of clicking.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
 2.4GHz processor, 1GB RAM, Geforce 6-series or ATI X1300 256MB graphics card with Shader Model 3.

HOW IT STACKS

REPUBLIC: THE REVOLUTION **88%**

EVIL GENIUS **84%**

TROPICO 3 **74%**

THIS SHOULD BE fun, right? Thrust into the squeaking, tropical shoes of a cruel and vitriolic dictator, you're going to get to lord it up over your very own island paradise, raking in oodles of cash and setting up the sort of brutal military regime that'd make Darth Vader blush.

Unfortunately, like the luxurious tropical island holidays we've all been on, a chunk of *Tropico 3* is spent sheltering from perpetual drizzle, clutching a soggy piña colada and instead dreaming of what might have been.

Despite all the sweet spots *Tropico 3* tragically misses, what it does, it does rather well. It's a deep sim game with enough graphical oomph and mix of strategies to make for a thoroughly satisfying build-'em-up. Construct farms and houses for your little chaps to live, connect them all with a network of roads, export some pineapples and then wait for the next boatload of cash to come in so you can build yet more stuff. All the

classic stuff, solidly done. Then there's an interesting mix of political dabbling thrown in to add to the guts of what is a well-crafted economy simulator.

BANANA REPUBLIC

Your underlings and citizens are affiliated with various factions, be that the communists or charmingly-bonkers religious zealots, and you need to juggle their wants in order to keep everyone as happy as possible. On top of all that, let's not forget, you're a dictator: when election time comes round, you're well within your rights to rig it entirely. Or start bumping people off. Or lower everyone's wages to nothing and prevent them from leaving the island no matter how upset they are about it all.

Yep, *Tropico 3* is crammed to bursting point with hilariously cruel and comical things to do. Such a shame, then, that the game then restricts their usage with an overly-realistic and ultimately very boring set of true-to-life





Ships full of bananas and immigrants.



Demolish it, build a little oil factory.

"Tropico 3 basically hates you and wants you to lose"

consequences for your actions. So the opportunity for 'removing' anyone who disagrees with you and ruling a broken populace with an iron fist is sadly lost, and instead your time as a cruel and twisted maniacal tyrant is largely spent making sure everyone has adequate wages and setting a reasonable immigration policy.

As a result, *Tropico 3* towers with one foot firmly in 'wacky scenario' and the other in 'boringly realistic', and you're left in between glancing up at its undulating, slightly-weird looking winkie as it wees out disappointment all over you.

Where problems pop up is how bitterly unforgiving the game is – the tutorial gently teaches you how to spin



Perfect spot for a little oil factory.

the camera around, before bewildering you with a whistle-stop tour of a baffling array of menus and sub-menus. All good stuff for depth-of-gameplay later on, but when the campaign starts proper you very quickly find yourself left all on your own.

MANGO DEMOCRACY

The first scenario will take about three hours – if you don't run out of money or lose an election, your population will likely reduce your palace to rubble by standing outside day and night hurling rocks and fistfuls of grass. So back to the beginning you go, trying to re-do all the things you think went right, all the while idly guessing what some of the mistakes might have been, with nary a word of advice from any in-game advisor.

You have to work it out for yourself, living your life in constant stressed-out fear of the game snatching away your power at any second should your regime go slightly sour for one of a bazillion potential reasons – rig an election, and angry people will turn up complaining

MAKING A MONSTER

Designing your own cruel, murderous dictator



Brilliantly, *Tropico 3* lets you design certain aspects of your villainous self – complete with various military uniforms, cigars and impossible hairstyles. But by far the most interesting aspect is picking your character's flaws, from kleptomania to Tourette's Syndrome. Sure, everyone wants to be a farting womaniser, but how will your flatulence affect your relations with those oh-so stuffy Yanks, let alone your poor palace guards who need extra pay to put up with your perpetual trumpy-bottoms?



Mountains really get in the way of industrial progress, sadly.

that you rigged the election. While the game does get easier as you get used to second-guessing it, you're going to have a constant struggle to hold onto power. *Tropico 3* basically hates you and wants you to lose. Its crippling lack of user-friendly gently-gently approach means you'll need to stick with it if you want the best out of it.

So then, ignore what *Tropico 3* screws up, and focus on what it does right, and you'll find there's a really involving little sim to be had here. If you're expecting it to be funny and clever and allow you to flex your evil muscle at the expense of some faceless minions, you'll be disappointed. If you like seeing virtual cash flow in by the shipload and making ever-larger tacky tourist traps, there's more than enough here to keep you going for a few Sunday afternoons. **PC7**

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Old, but passable
SOUND Annoying music
MULTIPLAYER None

- ✓ Deep and charming economy sim
- ✓ Plenty to see and do
- ✓ Loads of nefarious deeds...
 - ✗ ...which you can't really use
- ✗ Steep learning curve
- ✗ Music, while nice, is irritating

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Paradise Lost

REVIEWS FOOTBALL MANAGER 2010

19 Jul 2009 Sun 15:00 20 Mon 21 Tue 22 Wed 23 Thu

Back M Korda Liverpool Premier Division World

Liverpool v Peterborough (Friendly)

Pre-Match

Players - Condition

Pkd	Inf	Name	Position	Last 5 Games	Con
GK		José Manuel Reina	GK	-	90%
DR		Glen Johnson	D R	-	94%
DL		Fábio Aurélio	D/WB L	-	87%
DC		Jamie Carragher	D RC	-	95%
DC		Sotiris Kyrgiakos	D C	-	92%
MC		Steven Gerrard	AM RC	-	93%
MC		Javier Mascherano	DM, M C	-	92%
AMC		Ryan Babel	AM LC, F C	-	92%
AMC		Dirk Kuyt	AM R, ST	-	95%
AMC		Yossi Benayoun	AM RLC	-	92%
ST		Fernando Torres	ST	-	90%
S1		Diego Cavalieri	GK	-	93%
S2		Emiliano Insúa	D L	-	93%
S3		Andrea Dossena	D/WB/M L	-	94%
S4		Lucas	DM, M C	-	92%
S5		Albert Riera	AM L	-	92%
S6		Andriy Voronin	F C	-	91%
S7		Damien Plessis	DM, M C	-	91%
		Daniel Agger	D C	-	64%
		Martin Skrtel	D C	-	64%
		Zsolt Pölöskei	M C	-	89%
		Alberto Aquilani	AM C	-	58%

Positions (4-2-3-1)

Central Midfielder
Deep Lying Playmaker
Ball Winning Midfielder
Box To Box Midfielder
Advanced Playmaker

Defend
Support

RECOMMENDED
PCZONE
RECOMMENDED

FOOTBALL MANAGER 2010

Martin Korda cancels his life and heads pitch side...

DEVELOPER Sports Interactive
PUBLISHER SEGA
WEBSITE footballmanager.com
ETA 30 October
PRICE £39.99

AT A GLANCE...

The legendary series is back looking slicker than ever.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
1.4GHz processor (2GHz for *Vista*),
512MB RAM (1GB for *Vista*), and an
NVIDIA FX 5900 Ultra or ATI
Radeon 9800 graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

**FOOTBALL
MANAGER 2010** 88%

**CHAMPIONSHIP
MANAGER 2010** 80%

FIFA MANAGER 09 67%

WITH THE CHAMPIONSHIP
Manager series mounting a
resurgence of almost
Manchester City-style proportions, it's
time to see how the champ responds to
Beautiful Game Studios' challenge.

After last year's slightly disappointing
debuting 3D match engine, Sports
Interactive have clearly taken many of
the criticisms on board. One hundred
new animations and animated crowds
have been added, giving the game match
day experiences that are beginning to do
justice to the unrivalled realism of
Football Manager 2010's engine. But a
2D pitch view and commentary options
have been retained for the purists.

With the visual improvements in
place, watching matches has now

Press Conferences

Press conferences remain slightly underwhelming.

become an even more enjoyable
experience. Viewing games in their
entirety is akin to watching the real thing,
while it's always clear how your tactical
tweakings are influencing what's
happening on the field.

The full-screen match action also
possesses a collection of superb and
unobtrusive shortcuts that allow you to
make myriad changes without ever
taking your eye off the ball. Touchline
orders can now be barked at your
players, and range from commands to
retain possession to sitting deeper or
pushing up the pitch.

CUP WINNER

While *Championship Manager 2010* may
have raised its game in a number of key
departments, *FM2010* remains in a
league of its own in the field of match
realism, though once again you should
prepare yourself for a smattering of
irritating bugs and glitches, such as the
on-pitch action occasionally jamming for
extended periods.

Wherever you cast your eye you
discover tweaks, and while most of these
are minor rather than revolutionary,

FM2010 does feel more accessible than
its predecessor thanks to its complete
navigational overhaul and a fresh new
look that employs a clear, tabbed and
windowed interface not too dissimilar to
FIFA Manager's. But don't let that put
you off as within a couple of hours you'll
start seeing the redesign's benefits,
which are bolstered by streamlined and
improved player guidance and an
intuitive, step-by-step tactics creator. It's
also easier to define player roles, eg. box-
to-box or holding midfielder. Newcomers
have never been better catered for,
though the game's sheer depth could still
prove a stumbling block for *FM* virgins.

Another small but useful tweak is the
bolstered back room staff feedback,
which lets you grill your coaches on a
cornucopia of topics, such as
recommendations for new scouts to

48:23 Nottm Forest

No other match engine comes close to *FM2010's* realism.

Match View Controls

Martin Korda Manager

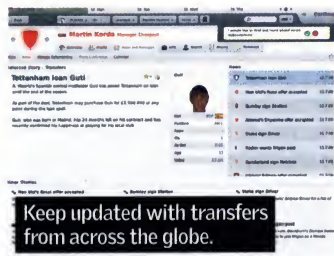
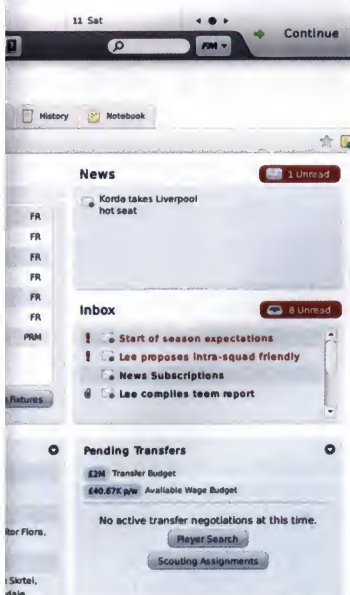
Next Match: Sunday 19th July 15:00

Peterborough v Liverpool

League Table

Pos	Inf	Team	Pts
5th		Bolton	0
6th		Burnley	0

The new layout is cleaner than in previous years.



opinions on how certain players can improve. This tool quickly becomes one of several invaluable aids that you use to decipher where your club's setup is succeeding and failing, and despite a few contradictions, the guidance you're given is generally very useful.

MEDIA WOES

Another neat touch is the revamped news section that allows you to keep track of key football-related events from across the globe, while an excellent filter system lets you customise exactly which news stories you're fed.

On a less positive note, there are a number of balancing issues, such as your

squad mewling that you're not giving them enough credit three games into pre-season, despite the fact you've sent them flowers and jam after every match as a token of your appreciation, while the team talk options remain as uninspired as ever.

There's also little evidence of improvement in the press conference

"Lawyers will be adding 'Football Manager' to divorce forms"

NOWHERE TO HIDE

See every kick, tackle, shot and gaffe...



While the title of this box might sound like a script that Steven Seagal would soil his under-crackers over, it's actually a subtle reference to *Football Manager's* new match analysis tool.

Clearly an attempt to contend with *Championship Manager's* ever improving *ProZone* tool, *FM's* first stab at a detailed match breakdown proves both effective and easy to use. Select a player, then choose to see all of their shots, tackles, passes etc, after which you can view every instance in all its 3D real time glory. It's simple, effective and an excellent addition to *FM's* arsenal.



department, with answers still feeling a little too obviously tired.

This is certainly the slickest *FM* to date: a hugely engrossing management experience that will have lawyers adding an extra box labelled '*Football Manager*' to divorce forms. However, there is an underlying, niggling feeling that the game lacks enough serious innovation.

For the first time in its history, the franchise finds itself second best to *Championship Manager* in a number of key departments – most noticeable, training, scouting and set pieces – and while its superiority remains intact, its dominance isn't as clear cut as in previous years. *Football Manager* is still the best, but the chasing pack is slowly, but very surely, closing the gap. **PCZ**

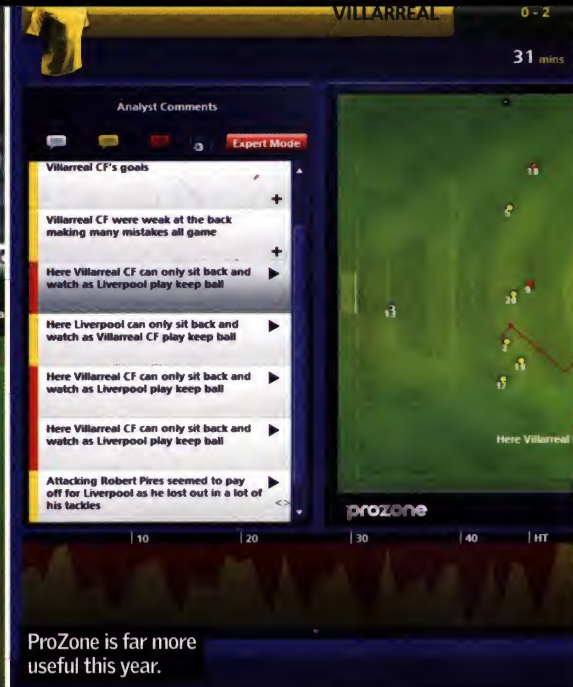
PCZONE

GRAPHICS Great 3D action
SOUND Quality crowd effects
MULTIPLAYER None

- ✓ Match engine looks better
- ✓ Navigation easier
- ✓ Excellent feedback
- ✗ Not innovative enough
- ✗ Some balancing issues

88

Still the champ!

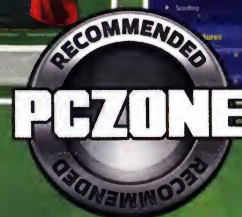


ProZone is far more useful this year.



The new 3D match engine is a triumph.

GOAL FOR LIVERPOOL!



CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 2010

Martin Korda finds BGS has done something new

DEVELOPER Beautiful
Game Studios
PUBLISHER Eidos
WEBSITE championship
manager.co.uk
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99

AT A GLANCE...

The latest *Championship Manager*.
'Nuff said.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
Pentium 4 3GHz, 1GB RAM, 128MB
NVIDIA FX5600 or ATI Radeon
9800 or equivalent graphics card, and
3GB disk space. Internet connection
required for subscription service.

HOW IT STACKS

FOOTBALL MANAGER 2009	90%
CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 2010	80%
CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 2008	71%

FOR THE FIRST time since Beautiful Game Studios took over development duties, the *Championship Manager* series poses a threat to *Football Manager*'s dominance. Instead of the usual 12-month development cycle, Eidos gave BGS two years to create *Championship Manager 2010*, and the extra time has certainly paid off. An all-new 3D match engine has replaced the bowling-pin players of *CM2008*, resulting in a far more immersive and believable experience.

Visually, *CM2010*'s match engine trumps *FM09*'s, though there are still some question marks hanging over match realism. Games are best watched in the highlights mode, during which

exciting passages of play help mask the engine's full match deficiencies. There are a few glitches on show here too, such as players sometimes hoofing the ball into touch for no apparent reason, goalkeepers parrying shots half a foot in front of their limbs and players bouncing off each other as though they're made of rubber. However, there are also many thrilling and tactical moments to enjoy, with playmakers putting their foot on the ball before making that killer pass, oafish centre halves knocking the fillings out of the opposition, and skilful players embarking on mazy runs.

Goalkeepers have also hugely improved since the hit-and-miss *CM2008*, no longer resolutely sitting on their lines as strikers charge towards

them in one-on-one situations, but instead rushing forward to narrow the angle. These net-minders also leap impressively for shots and crosses and as a result, are far more believable than *FM09*'s bag-of-spuds 'keepers.

NOT A RIP OFF

There are hundreds of excellent player animations to enjoy, ranging from players pulling up their socks, burying their heads in their hands and peeling off towards the crowd to celebrate goals. The full-screen action is further improved by varying stadium and weather effects, while a collection of excellent pop-up tactical and information tabs allow you to quickly change strategies and keep an eye on the myriad of informative statistics.

Training is another area that has received an extensive revamp. You can now watch your squad being put through its paces on the training pitch, which allows you to test new tactics,

"After many years of slavishly copying *Football Manager*, BGS is attempting to innovate"

Match action good, but isn't as realistic as *FM*'s.

MAKE YOUR PLAY

Take control of your set pieces...



One of *Championship Manager 2010*'s best features is its set piece creator. No longer are you at the mercy of how the AI interprets your free-kick instructions, as you can now create detailed plans with this intuitive tool.

Whether you want a player to shoot from the edge of the area or create fiendishly complex moves containing dummy runs and a number of passes, the set piece creator provides you with an excellent level of control. And when you see one of your lovingly created free kicks pay off in a competitive game, you'll howl with unbridled joy.

View the action from a variety of angles and vantage points.



Set up scouting networks across the world.

formations and line-ups without fear of getting the sack. The tactical match analysis tool ProZone is also far more useful this time around, thanks to the game's increased challenge levels and more tactical match action.

The new media feature is another plus point, providing you with short

news reports about the latest transfer activity from across the globe. And speaking of transfers, *CM2010* allows you just enough leeway to buy star players, but some robust negotiation features and greater player demands ensure that singing them is never a foregone conclusion.

When it comes to issuing individual and team tactical instructions, there's no shortage of options. You can set your team's formation both for defensive and offensive phases of play and create player feeds and runs, while an easy to use drag-and-drop tactics chart lets you target specific opposition weaknesses.

After many years of slavishly copying *Football Manager*, BGS has broken with tradition by attempting to innovate. A prime example is the new scouting system, which forces you to scout players several times before you can ascertain their abilities. The more times you have them watched, the more accurately their stats are represented. You can also set up scouting networks across the world to find undiscovered talent, which you can then hopefully snap up for pennies.

While *CM2010* is far from perfect (navigation remains a problem for one) there's more than enough here to warrant a closer look. It may lack the complexity and sheer, unrelenting

hardcore realism of *Football Manager*, but if you've been hankering for a fun, innovative and forgiving alternative to Sports Interactive's behemoth, then *Championship Manager 2010* could be just the ticket. **PCZ**

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Good 3D engine
SOUND Decent crowd effects
MULTIPLAYER None

- ✓ Great 3D match engine
- ✓ Excellent, innovative features
- ✓ More accessible than *FM*
- ✗ A few annoying glitches
- ✗ Match realism falls short

80

The best in years

'Lawro' and Champion do a passable job on the mic.

The Champions League, replete with warbling music.

Penalties are an acquired skill.

Become A Legend... in your dreams.

Coverage
MARK LAWRENSON
Commentary
JON CHAMPION

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 2010

Steve Hill puts on his home shirt...

DEVELOPER Konami
PUBLISHER Konami
WEBSITE konami-pes2010.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99



AT A GLANCE...

The long-running series introduces 360° dribbling and increased realism into last year's model.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
1.8GHz processor, 512MB RAM, and a 128MB graphics card

HOW IT STACKS

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 2009 **85%**

UEFA EURO 2008 **68%**

FIFA 10 **66%**

THIS GENERATION HAS not been great for the once-imperious *Pro Evolution Soccer*, with some ropy instalments seeing it finally fall behind the *FIFA* behemoth. However, Konami have at least had the decency to allow PC gamers in on the party, with the same *PES* being released on the three main platforms (unlike *FIFA* – see the next page).

Never is this more in evidence than in 2010, with the PC version coming replete with Xbox 360 instructions – press A etc – and even a great big picture of a 360 pad in the configuration section.

Which brings us clumsily to the game's major improvement, that of 360° dribbling. Like this year's console *FIFA*, the arcane eight-way control system has been replaced by a more realistic affair, and once you've tried it there really is no going back. This new system offers far greater control over player movement, providing of course you have a decent analogue pad.

Elsewhere, for the brave (or stupid), manual goalkeepers are available, enabling you to take complete control of the hapless berk between the sticks.

The player animations have also been improved, and their little legs pump away at a frantic pace, with a largely high-tempo approach. With practice, some intelligent possession football can be played however, and it's not simply a case of tearing down the wings and whipping a hopeful ball into the mixer – although that of course is still effective.

COMPLETE CONTROL

Off the pitch, while the licensing situation has improved to include the Champions League and, finally, the Dutch national team, it's still embarrassing to see the likes of North London taking on Yorkshire Orange. That said, it's testament to the game's underlying quality that you'll be prepared to overlook these non-corporate foibles in favour of what is often thrilling action.

With immaculate physics, the players connect with the ball with what commentators refer to as 'purchase', making for some net-bulging goals and compelling matches, with marathon sessions commonplace, particularly if you get stuck into the life-sapping Master League. **PCZ**

Those rumours won't go away...

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Excellent
SOUND Improved commentary, licensed music
MULTIPLAYER Online and off

- ✓ 360° movement
- ✓ Absorbing gameplay
- ✓ Facial likenesses
- ✗ Usual licensing nonsense
- ✗ A pad's the only way to play

85

FIFA killer

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gamestation.co.uk

gamestation

REVIEWS **FIFA 10**

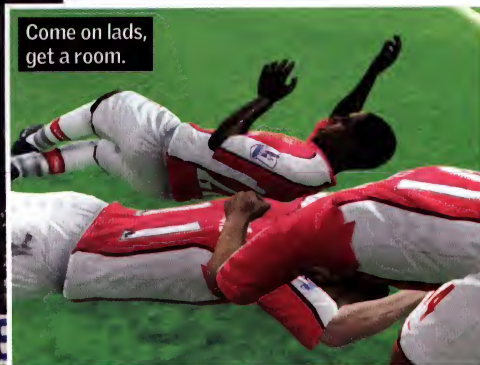
One day we'll score from a free kick.

19.7 m



10 Robinho

Come on lads, get a room.



Be A Pro mode lets you play as one player.

FIFA 10

Steve Hill gets his FIFA accreditation...

DEVELOPER EA Canada
PUBLISHER EA
WEBSITE easports.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

AFTER YEARS OF playing second fiddle – critically, if not commercially – to the sublime *Pro Evolution Soccer*, it's widely accepted that *FIFA* has now edged ahead of its rival. Indeed this year's next-gen console instalment is being hailed in some quarters as no less than the greatest football game of all time. Unfortunately, the PC version isn't anything of the sort.

While console owners are treated to the all-singing, all-dribbling *FIFA*, we PC chumps with our hi-def monitors and internet-ready machines are palmed off with a sketchy hybrid of the new game and the previous generation.

While the PC's *FIFA 10* does share such features as the Be A Pro mode, where you control a solitary player

throughout his career, on the pitch it's a different story with the game engine leagues behind that used on consoles. This has been the norm for the past few seasons, but somehow it seems even worse this year, with the PC game's eight-way dribbling looking positively primitive compared to the new 360° stylings of the consoles and *PES 2010*.

OLD SCHOOL

We've genuinely seen (and heard) it all before, with the same old graphics allied to the cut-and-paste commentary of Clive Tyldesley and Andy Gray.

The action is more sedate than in previous years, and much slower than this year's *PES*, but having more time on the ball doesn't necessarily lead to more

thrills, with leaden physics making for moribund encounters. The controls also feel spongy, and the whole thing doesn't add up, like playing on a treacle pitch, on the moon.

As for the all-important goals, there are rarely any screamers, and the ball frequently seems to be

bundled cheaply over the line to the surprise of all involved. One-on-ones with the keeper too often involve the ball being deflected back to the striker who inadvertently shines it in. Furthermore, goal shots taken from distance hit the post a suspiciously high number of times, making for some extremely contrived faux-excitement.

Off the pitch of course, *FIFA 10* is the usual feature packed, licensed to the gills affair. It's just a shame about the actual football. **PC7**

AT A GLANCE...

PC gamers are again lumbered with an increasingly antiquated version of the world's biggest football game.

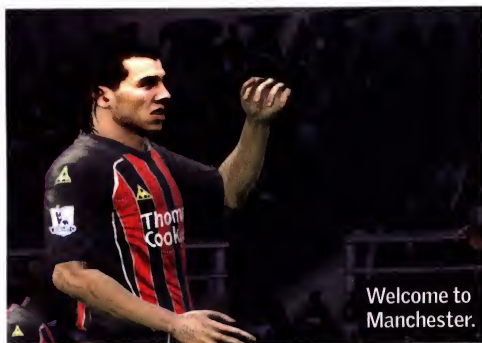
MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS: 2.4GHz processor, 512MB RAM, and a 128MB graphics card

HOW IT STACKS

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 2010 **85%**

FIFA 09 **74%**

FIFA 10 **66%**



Welcome to Manchester.

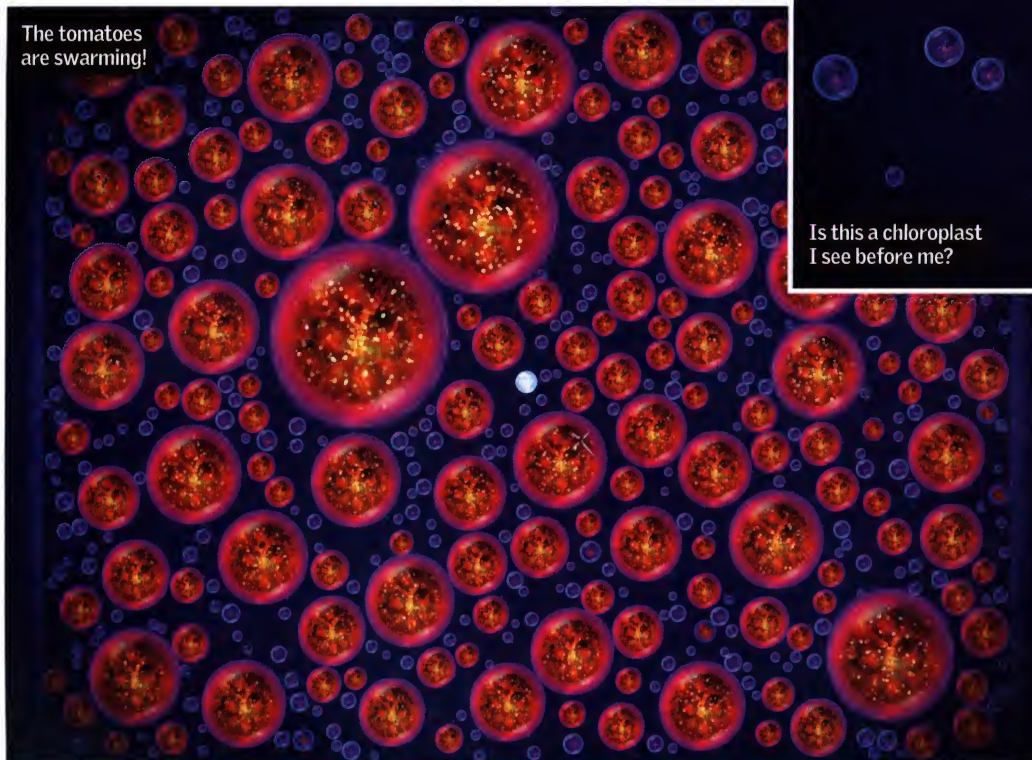
PCZONE

GRAPHICS Acceptable
SOUND Decent
MULTIPLAYER Yes

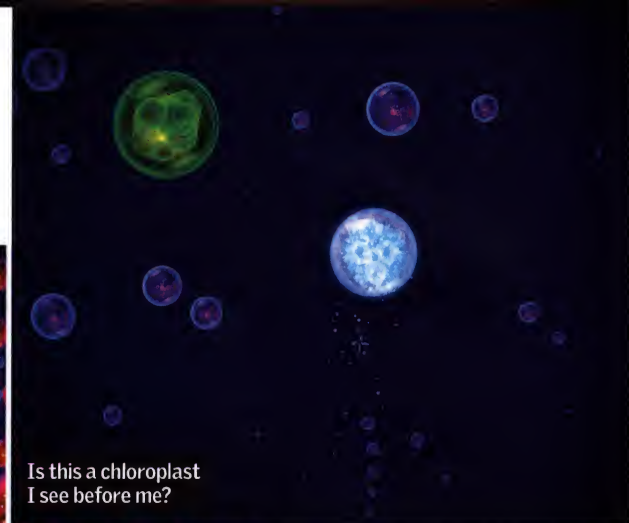
- ✓ Loads of teams
- ✓ Highly authentic
- ✗ Turgid action
- ✗ Not next-gen

66
Last season's kit

The tomatoes are swarming!



Is this a chloroplast I see before me?



The bottom of my coffee mug.



Glowing cells can't be healthy.



OSMOS

Steve Hogarty preys on those smaller than him...



DEVELOPER Hemisphere
PUBLISHER Steam
WEBSITE hemispheregames.com/osmos
ETA Out now
PRICE £6.99

IN *OSMOS* YOU control a mote, a tiny microbe whose sole ability, besides absorbing its peers, is to eject part of itself in one direction in order to move in the other. Smaller, absorbable motes are blue while the larger motes are a fiery red. Absorb a mote and its mass is added to yours turning red motes to a vulnerable blue hue, but to move at all you must propel yourself by expelling mass in the opposite direction.

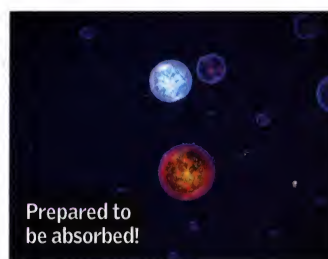
You might, for example, poop out a few smaller motes to your left to move yourself towards and collect a blue mote to your right, but in doing so, you could lose just enough mass that the mote you're trying to collect becomes larger than you. In a panic you fire off mass to your right to reverse your direction. The other mote happily collects your ejaculated mass and becomes even larger, while you shrivel away having wasted your mass in pointless movements, a panicking and dejected dust particle.

The other motes simply float about the game's zone guided by their own momentum, waiting to be absorbed, or happening to collide with and absorb

one another, growing larger through inaction. Later levels introduce intelligent motes and special ones that attract or deflect mass. The attractor levels in particular have exciting setups, in which you're effectively launching yourself through solar systems of motes along projected paths with orbiting planets and moons to negotiate.

AI-controlled motes, as long as you're larger than them, can be chased, forcing them to jettison blobs of themselves as they bolt away from you. Anti-matter motes can turn regular motes into nothing, and so carefully nudging the level's largest competitors into equally sized anti-matter motes reduces them both to manageable sizes. You can even speed up and slow down time, for convenience and control.

Osmos is clever, fun and challenging, though often it reaches the point of seething frustration when it demands precision. Some levels require a slow, cautious, perfect and, by the third time you attempt it, tedious approach, and it's incredibly difficult to recover from your mistakes.



Prepared to be absorbed!

AT A GLANCE...

Beautiful little puzzley distraction, eat things smaller than you to become bigger.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
1GHz processor, 512MB RAM, and a 3D graphics card with OpenGL support.

HOW IT STACKS

OSMOS 82%

GEOMETRY WARS: RETRO EVOLVED 80%

ASTEROIDS 68%

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Pretty, sparkly
SOUND Ambient loveliness
MULTIPLAYER Nope

- ✓ Simple, straightforward
- ✓ Challenging
- ✓ Addictive
- ✓ Varied and clever
- ✗ Some protracted levels

82

Suck it up



BATTLEFIELD HEROES

Taking on the cartoon fake Nazis is *Jon 'Log' Blyth*

DEVELOPER EA DICE
PUBLISHER EA
WEBSITE battlefieldheroes.com
ETA Out now
PRICE Free to play



AT A GLANCE...

A cartoony WWII multiplayer shooter. Doesn't break new ground, but is fun enough. Besides, it won't cost you a penny.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
1GHz processor, 512MB (1GB for Vista), and a 64MB video card. Broadband internet connection required.

HOW IT STACKS

TEAM FORTRESS 2 **93%**

LEFT 4 DEAD **90%**

BATTLEFIELD HEROES **71%**

ANYONE WOULD THINK it was embarrassing to be a Nazi. First, *LEGO Indy* gets rid of all the Swastikas to stop a LEGO character ever appearing naughty, and now in this free-to-play online *Battlefield* shooter, they're restyled the National Army.

Battlefield Heroes isn't the TF2 rip-off it was easy to assume it'd be, but neither is it a fully fledged member of the *Battlefield* canon. The third-person view, the slower pace, and the array of weapons, cooldowns, missions, and levels make it feel more like an MMO than most other shooters. Starting up is painful – chances are you'll be the only level one character in the neighbourhood (at which point you can't even sprint) but once you get to level five, and you'll have a decent spread of weak weaponry.

Your choice of classes is basic, and identical for both teams – the National Army and the Royalists. The Gunner



glides around the four maps, mopping up bullets with his HP-stacked body, and spraying them back with his minigun. The Commando is the dirty tricks spy with (rather ineffective) invisibility, traps, low HP and a sniper rifle. And the Soldier is your fence-sitting compromise between the two.

IT'S NOT TF2

Games are quick – around 10 minutes – and they're all based around the ticketing system of capturing points and killing each other. You can't swap though classes: think of playing MMOs, in terms of logging out and in again with your other characters. It seems a shame you can't level up one character in more than one style. But then again, it's always good to leave and come back anonymously, after a disastrous match.

Character customisation at the start is basic, as EA are hoping you'll want to create a unique character by investing in Battlefunds: some suits can be rented using the earned Valor Points (VP), but it's BF you'll be spending if you want anything for keeps.

Charging people for vanity seems perfectly acceptable to me: if this model works for EA, long may the desire of others to be pointlessly different subsidise my freeloading lifestyle.

Heroes plays smoothly – gliding and dreamlike, in fact. However, there's not enough variety in terms of maps and characters to keep you engaged for the long haul. But there are some moments of classic *Battlefield* brilliance to be had, especially on the vehicle maps. And because it's free, I can say bland things like "it's definitely worth a look" without worrying too much about the nation's wallets. So, "give it a try". **PCZ**

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Clean, neat, fast, fun
SOUND Ba-dink, wah-wah, pyow
MULTIPLAYER Nothing else but

- ✓ It's free
- ✓ Plays smoothly
- ✓ Cartoon Nazis
- ✗ Lacking variety
- ✗ Early levels too underpowered

71

Free goodness



"Here zombie zombie zombie."

20 Sheva 10 COVER
10 32 Chris

RESIDENT EVIL 5

Marco Fiori gets down with the sickness

DEVELOPER Capcom
PUBLISHER Capcom
WEBSITE residentevil.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99



AT A GLANCE...

Capcom finally deliver their PC version of their zombie obsessed horror title.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
Pentium D / AMD X2 or higher, 1GB RAM, and a Geforce 6800GTX.

HOW IT STACKS

LEFT 4 DEAD 93%

RESIDENT EVIL 5 85%

KILLING FLOOR 69%

WE'VE BEEN WAITING since March for Capcom's juggernaut. Their PC track record isn't exactly glowing, so it's been an apprehensive six months. Thankfully we have an excellently ported game on our hands. It isn't bursting with extras, but it has all that a PC port should have: working controls, improved graphics, and the same features as its console cousin.

By now you probably know the basics. A fictional African state is in disarray and Chris Redfield has been flown in by the BSAA to team up with local girl Shiva Alomar, in order to curb the bioterrorist threat. Naturally everything goes south. The locals are deranged, bleeding from the eyes, and their heads are exploding into a mass of tentacles. Just another day in paradise.

Unsurprisingly everyone else is a bit shit at staying alive, so it quickly comes

down to you and your co-op partner. You can leave her in the hands of the competent AI, or if you've got a friend handy, they can jump in using *Games For Windows - LIVE*. Fighting through the game together does remove *RE5*'s sense of isolation horror, but it makes it far more enjoyable.

OUT OF AFRICA

For one, it makes the finicky inventory system manageable. While the inclusion of mouse support has lessened its irritation factor, it's still awkward selecting things in the heat of battle. Capcom have implemented hot-swappable keys, but remembering the constantly changing items' number often makes them all but null and void. Still, after a bit of practice, you'll be dispatching the infected with ease.

Another PC plus point is the increased mobility that the mouse and keyboard brings. The controls work perfectly and gunplay is far more accurate due to the mouse's precision. The enemy hordes may lack *L4D*'s frantic pace, but when they advance on you it's hard not to feel on edge. Ammo might be more abundant in *RE5* than its predecessors, but that doesn't stop you from running out at crucial points so

you'll still need to choose shots wisely.

Throw in higher resolutions (making a beautiful game even better), new outfits, upgradeable weapons, a fleshed out mercenaries mode, benchmarking, and 3D support, means you'll come back again and again to *Resident Evil 5*. We guarantee it. **PCZ**

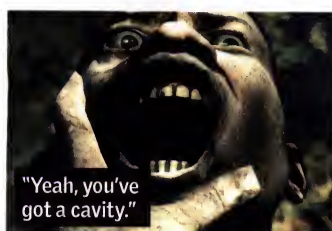
Shiva: an African named after a hindu diety. How very multicultural.



GRAPHICS Spectacular
SOUND Spooky
MULTIPLAYER Co-op

- ✓ It's a PC port done right
- ✓ Higher resolutions for everyone!
- ✗ Inventory still struggles

85
Port perfect





This guy is CWAZY,
just like Daffy Duck.

SECTION 8

Jon 'Log' Blyth goes crazy for guns

DEVELOPER TimeGate
PUBLISHER SouthPeak
WEBSITE joinsection8.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99

AT A GLANCE...

A fairly standard shooter that's really only fun when played with others. Even then, it's hardly flawless.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
3GHz processor, 1GB RAM (2GB for Vista), GeForce 7800 or ATI X1800 graphics card with Shader Model 3.

HOW IT STACKS

LEFT 4 DEAD 93%

BATTLEFIELD HEROES 71%

SECTION 8 65%

SECTION 8 ARE the craziest sons of bitches in the intergalactic space corps. Men with mental issues that lead them to take extreme risks, fire themselves at planets, and act like big manly war bastards. Wearing their prototype suits, the S8 troopers are the first wave of attack, shot from the atmosphere into war zones, and sent to capture bases on hostile planets.

That's the setup, and it's familiar enough, so let's try to focus on what makes *Section 8* interesting. It's not the single-player mode, which is worth playing only as a tutorial. It introduces the familiar processes of point capture, and the innovative element of *Section 8*: the "burn-in" that lets you enter a map from above, at almost any point (enemy AA guns permitting – but you can always take them out once you've landed). And there are requisition points that let you buy turrets, radar-boosting sensor arrays, and vehicles.

But there's a reason single-player is the third option on the main menu: *Section 8* is a multiplayer creature. Sadly, my attempts to join matches mainly lumped me in with 31 moronic bots, which is possibly the matchmaking routines having a joke at my expense.

When you do play other people, every map is a point-capture map. The levels unfold uniquely, though, thanks to the fact you enter the map where you want, set up deployable gears where you see fit, and issue Dynamic Combat Missions. These take the form of escort, capture the flag, or attack missions, that boost your team's score if completed.

One team's mission gives the other team the opposing objective – base defence, assassinate, and so on – and really breaks up the level into chapters. It also means that getting organised is much more effective than being a squad of 16 lone wolves.

SOMETHING DIFFERENT

So, *Section 8* does things in its own way. In an ideal world, this would be a great thing. But the interaction between the troopers' excessive shields and weapons is unintuitive. A lot of understanding *Section 8* lies in working out how the weapons behave, and playing to your classes strengths. Until you do that, you'll end up emptying clip after clip of bullets into an enemy's head, without understanding why he isn't dying.

Section 8 has a peculiar but not unappealing taste: but once you cash in



We're not sure if you
shoot this guy or not?



What happens when you
use rose-coloured specs.



Good shot. It only took
you eight to get him.

your nontransferable *Games For Windows – Live* code its resale value is nil. So this is absolutely a game where downloading a demo makes sense. Which is a damn shame, as SouthPeak have decided there won't be one for the PC. Just another example of unacceptable console favouritism. **PCZ**

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Space marines with helmets and dirty metal
SOUND Guns, mainly
MULTIPLAYER Unless you enjoy boredom

- ✓ Lots of tactical freedom
- ✓ Looks swell
- ✗ Space Marines – again
- ✗ Dull single-player
- ✗ Steep learning curve

65
Wrong outweighs the right

State of Play

We look at the changes made to games after their release...



THIS MONTH...

STAR WARS GALAXIES

PUBLISHER LucasArts DEVELOPER Sony Online Entertainment
WEBSITE starwarsgalaxies.station.sony.com



They're practicing lightsabre poses.

IF THERE WAS a book on how to bork an MMO, *Star Wars Galaxies* would be the prime case study. In the space of two years it went from being the most eagerly awaited game of its time, to one that saw players leave in the thousands.

Sony Online Entertainment got the development gig for *Star Wars Galaxies* on the back of the success of *EverQuest*. During the three-year build up to its release, canny marketing saw 400,000 joining *Galaxies'* online community before the game was released.

Simon Jeffery – then the president of LucasArts – saw this player involvement as being vital: "We firmly believe that consistent and open communication with fans will be one of the keys to the success of the *Star Wars Galaxies* experience."

So when *An Empire Divided – Galaxies'* core game – was launched, expectations were sky high. But when they logged on for the first time, players were landed with a confused mess.

A NEW GOOF

There was no doubt that *An Empire Divided* had its fine points. For its time, it was a beautiful game, including accurate recreations of iconic locations like towers of Naboo and Jabba the Hutt's Palace. And one of the most praised aspects of the game was character generation.

By allowing players to take skills from any of six core professions, follow 24 specialist careers, and develop a highly customisable avatar, each player was assured their character was unique.

Interestingly, one of the professions had nothing to do with combat. Artisans were entertainers or created items – anything from ray guns to buildings – that could be sold to other players, and so could earn experience as professional traders, builders, dancers or musicians.

"Has a long way to go if it's going to warm gamers' hearts"

67% – George Jones, *PC ZONE* #132

While this was innovative, it wasn't *Star Wars*. It was dull. This was one of the things SOE aimed to change with the *Combat Upgrade*.

On the 27 April, 2005 players found fighting in the game had been radically altered; grouping became important; combat levels were no longer an underlying mechanic; and powers, weapons, armor and buffs were all rebalanced. The result – an improved system that encouraged team play – was controversial amongst players, and thousands cancelled their subscriptions, believing *Galaxies* had changed from a unique game to a clone of other MMOs.



A PLAGUE OF PADAWANS

Anyone here not a jedi?

When *Galaxies* launched, becoming a jedi was a huge investment. Players had to reach Master level in all of their core characters' skills before they were allowed to make one 'Force Sensitive' character. Even then becoming a novice jedi required a long period of training.

But *NGE* allowed new players to start as a jedi knight. Not only did this contradicted the *Star Wars* canon, where jedi were rarer than hookers in seminars, it angered veterans. Players who'd invested months into unlocking jedi characters found themselves surrounded by robed newcomers comparing Force powers. It was a slap in the face. With a lightsabre.



Despite this dissatisfaction, SOE didn't react to the players' concerns. And six months later they introduced the *New Game Enhancements*, turning *Galaxies* into the game it is now.

The *NGE*'s massive, sudden and unannounced overhaul of *Galaxies* was a fundamental shift from its origins. People who loved the original *Star Wars* movies because they were fairy tales with ray guns. But for all its depth and complexity, but the original *Galaxies* lacked soul. And Jedi (see 'A Plague Of Padawans'). With the *NGE Galaxies* regained the excitement of *Star Wars*, gave new players an easier way into the game, thanks to a massively simplified character generation system, and the chance to be jedi from the outset.

These changes angered old-time players who were forced to alter their

characters to fit the limited nine-class structure SOE had introduced. Again, another massive subscriber walk-out occurred. This time player-created cities were emptied as entire communities left.

A WRONG MOVE

With the *NGE*, SOE planned to increase *Galaxies*' player base by simplifying the game. Instead they delivered a critical blow to the MMO, and tarnished their own reputation.

When SOE took over the MMO *Vanguard* in 2007, John Smedley – SOE's president – stated: "We've learned a thing or two with our experiences with the *NGE* and don't plan on repeating mistakes from the past and not listening to the players." An admission that SOE's attitude was the polar opposite of LucasArts' aims for the game.



As R2-D2's Jawa phobia kicked in, CP30 failed to be brave.

WTF is an X-Wing doing in *EVE*?

THE STORY SO FAR... STAR WARS GALAXIES



JUNE 2003

The dreams of thousands of wannabe jedi are fulfilled, as *Galaxies* was launched to the praise of critics and gamers alike.



16 NOVEMBER 2003

The first Force Sensitive character – Akinom T'Sarn – was unlocked this day. Much praise was lauded on her player, Monika T'Sarn.



OCTOBER 2004

The *Jump to Lightspeed* expansion added two new races, space travel and combat, and the chance for players to build spacecraft.



MAY 2005

Rage of the Wookiees opened the world of Kashyyyk – a hub and instanced dungeons.



1 NOVEMBER 2005

Trials of Obi-Wan brought a new planet and HK-47 from *KOTOR*, but players had no clue what was coming next.

15 NOVEMBER 2005

When the *New Game Enhancements* kicked in, thousands of long-time players quit the game. *Galaxies* never recovered.

Today, *Galaxies* is still running, but its time is limited. Despite being the only *Star Wars* MMO and a well-polished MMO, unofficial estimates places subscriber numbers at under 100,000, and SOE closed 12 of its 24 servers this month. It's telling the game itself is only available from a few online stores.

But the real death blow will likely be *The Old Republic*, being made by *Knights of the Old Republic* developer BioWare.

VERDICT

While *Galaxies* is fun, it plays just like a *Warcraft* clone. This MMO is only for hardcore *Star Wars* fans, but they'll be let down by SOE's take on this galaxy, that is far, far away.

Richard Cosgrove

Budget

This month *Richard Cosgrove* is thrown into the bargain bin

STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC

PUBLISHER LucasArts WEBSITE bioware.com PRICE £6.99

BUDGET
GAME
OF THE
MONTH

THAT THIS RPG is only six years old feels strange, given its immense influence. *Knights of the Old Republic* was the first PC game to combine RPG play with cinematic storytelling. BioWare didn't put a foot wrong putting *KOTOR* together: the setting is original yet canonical; the characters instantly iconic; and its story was gripping, epic and personal, and adapted to your decisions. But now *KOTOR*'s flaws stand out.

To start you spend 75% of the time running between locations. You pick up



It's a good job they're wearing brown pants.

a mission from a stationary NPC, spend a long while running to the location where you complete it, run back to the NPC, who gives you a new mission, and you run, and repeat ad infinitum. To make it worse, there's no autorun button.

This is made more infuriating by the control system being awkward and fiddly. Using the mouse to change direction means moving the mouse cursor to the edge of the screen, so you end up using the keyboard to turn.

And the combat is really dull. If you use a firearm all you do is select a target, queue up four special attacks (hint: rapid shot), and wait for your opponent to die. You can't use cover, or even move without disengaging from the fight, so there's very little chance for tactical play.



Hey, what the hell is Bastila doing there? Oh... *SPOILER*.

Melee combat is the same: click on a bad guy, use a Force power (hint: stasis field), queue attacks (hint: flurry), and repeat until corpses surround you. Beyond choosing your special abilities, fights require no skill by the player.

Finally, there's being evil. Your actions over the course of the game determine whether you become a Jedi Master or

a Sith Lord. But you don't act really evil; you're more of an obnoxious dick. But given your other option is to be an obnoxious paragon, this balances out.

Despite these flaws *Knights of the Old Republic* is a brilliant game – BioWare's epic sci-fi story is packed with humour and drama, and the "douchebag or not" option gives it some replay value. Play this game, if only as a taster for the upcoming *The Old Republic* MMO.

THIS MONTH PCZONE SAVED MONEY BY...

Ali ignored the email from an East African priest asking for her bank account details. **SAVING** All her money



"Bloody potatoes!" Steve was fed by his family, and was reminded why he left Ireland. **SAVING** £74

David stayed in bed instead of coming to work, putting the blame on a failed CAT scan. **SAVING** £150



Lightsabres cut through anything. So how do swords parry them?

PCZONE

81

Pure Star Wars heroism

ZENERCHI

PUBLISHER PlayFirst WEBSITE playfirst.com PRICE £7.49

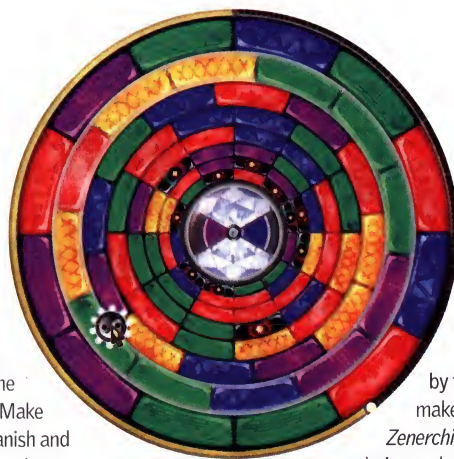
THIS GAME OCCUPIES the exact amount of brainpower I've left while watching *St Elsewhere* on my PC.

Like every other match-3 game the aim of *Zenerchi* is to move at least three coloured blocks into a line to make them

vanish. In this game this is done by turning rings to line up the coloured blocks. Make enough blocks vanish and you complete a level.

Things are complicated by two special blocks: one locks the rings in place, and the other cause two to move at once, in opposite directions.

This game has an against-the-clock puzzle mode, but it also has a timer-less one – Zen. The lack of pressure, ambient soundtrack, and the deep grinding made



by the rings, makes playing *Zenerchi* both as calming and as addictive as opium-coated M&Ms.

Until you reach level 12 of Zen mode. Then the bloody twat turns so bastard hard it leaves you incoherently screaming in a psychotic blood rage.



Those grey bits mean you're shafted.

PCZONE
63

MASS EFFECT

PUBLISHER EA WEBSITE masseffect.bioware.com PRICE £12.99

THE CUT-PRICE RE-RELEASE of this RPG is hardly a surprise, given *Mass Effect 2* is on the event horizon, but it's welcome nonetheless.

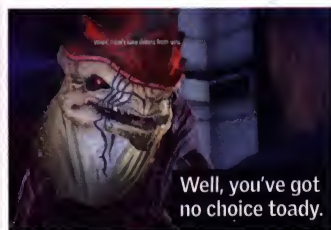
Following the adventures of Commander Shepard – a space marine in the not-overly distant future – *Mass Effect* is a truly epic space opera, seeing Shepard and his rag-tag team of alien allies fighting the advance of the robotic Geth, and the traitor who leads them.

With this game BioWare managed to successful mix a story-driven RPG and a tactical third-person shooter, while including a sense of the cinematic that shames Hollywood. Everything in this game is pitch-perfect – the acting, the design, the drop-dead gorgeous graphics, the looks of the characters, the storyline, and the battles. Well, almost everything.

Like many RPGs you seem to spend a great deal of time running between

locations. And you can end up avoiding talking to NPCs, as nearly every one seems to spend hours monologuing about themselves. Some of which is interesting if you're into backstory, but it does get a bit tiresome. And then there's the Mako – an all-terrain tank used to get around on planets, whose handling is based on a space hopper. But the only reason these flaws stand out so much is because the rest of the game is made to a remarkably high standard.

If you haven't played *Mass Effect*, do so. Especially if you want *Mass Effect 2*, as events in *Mass Effect* (even the seemingly trifling ones) will effect how the story in the sequel plays out.



Well, you've got no choice toady.



Shoot the shapes.

PCZONE
90

AND THE REST...

The other cheap releases out now



MAHJONG COLLECTION

PRICE £6.99, Steam

A set of three tile-matching games. Fun if you like picking up tiles. Avoid if you don't.

56



JEDI KNIGHT: MYSTERIES OF THE SITH

PRICE £1.99, Steam

Ancient graphics-wise, but one of the best *Star Wars* actioners.

80



MDK 2

PRICE £6.99, Steam

Frankly, this game is bat-shit crazy nonsense. But it's damn fun bat-shit crazy nonsense.

78

PCZONE TOP 5 BUDGET GAMES



MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR

PRICE £10, White Label

The historical RTS game that set the standard for others to follow. Buy it, if only to try out the mods.



FAR CRY

PRICE £5, Sold Out

With *Far Cry 2* out it's time for the original to take the spotlight again. The second-best FPS ever made.



THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND

PRICE £5, Mastertronic

If RPG is your favourite genre, you could do a lot worse than this epic, sprawling classic.



PSYCHONAUTS

PRICE £10, Steam

You won't have more fun than this psychological shooter until *Brütal Legend* comes out. If it ever does.



SID MEIER'S PIRATES!

PRICE £5, Sold Out

That's all the genres covered, isn't it? RTS, FPS, RPG, platformer and pirate. Yep, that's really everything.

Buyer's Guide

Don't stop buying them until they're bought

PCZ TOP 5 FUNNIEST GAMES

- 1 THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND
- 2 DAY OF THE TENTACLE
- 3 PSYCHONAUTS
- 4 PORTAL
- 5 SAM & MAX HIT THE ROAD

PCZ TOP 5 GAMES WHERE YOU'RE THE BAD GUY

- 1 GRAND THEFT AUTO (ANY)
- 2 OVERLORD
- 3 BLADE RUNNER
- 4 FAR CRY 2
- 5 PROTOTYPE

PCZ TOP 5 GAMES WITH A GIRL IN THE LEAD

- 1 FAHRENHEIT
Carla Valenti – detective and Playboy model.
- 2 TOMB RAIDER
Lara Croft – crap archeologist.
- 3 VELVET ASSASSIN
Violette Summer – WWII Secret Intelligence Service spy.
- 4 BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL
Jade – investigative journalist.
- 5 NO-ONE LIVES FOREVER
Cate Archer – '60s cat burglar turned secret agent.



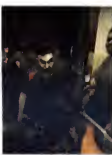
FPS



HALF-LIFE 2 + EPISODES

PCZ Issues: 148 (97%), 170 (91%), 187 (82%)

Excelling in terms of action, storyline, emotion and ingenious set pieces, the continuing adventures of Gordon Freeman have yet to be equalled. Yes, a moderate amount of the action has faded through repetition by the time the episodes kick in, but with its Combine-defying freedom fighting, this is still the most finely crafted shooter experience ever released on PC. Gordon's alive, and long may he remain so.



LEFT 4 DEAD

PCZ Issue: 202 – 93%

The only thing the we like more than killing zombies is killing zombies as a team. And that's what 4D provides: a chance to scream with your buddies as you kill endless amounts of mindless and murderous plague victims.



TEAM FORTRESS 2

PCZ Issue: 187 – 93%

Beautifully balanced and engaging, Valve's update of the classic mod is a triumph, bringing together the best of online shooters and topping it all off with superb animation that rivals the best Pixar's films.



CRYSIS WARHEAD

PCZ Issue: 199 – 92%

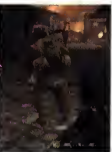
This standalone expansion only takes a few hours to complete, but it reins in the harsh system demands of the original, and contains fantastic action storytelling, and a much improved alien AI.



FAR CRY 2

PCZ Issue 201 – 90%

A triumph of non-linear gameplay, Far Cry 2 offers an astounding chunk of Africa in which to play with guns, flames and explosions. The residents are too tenacious, but in a world this well-realised, you won't care.



CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE

PCZ Issue: 188 – 89%

Big, brash and extremely loud, Infinity Ward's latest ultra-intense shooter offers some strikingly original military action. With superb multiplayer in tow, it's often an utter delight to play.



BIOSHOCK

PCZ Issue: 185 – 96%

This psion of System Shock 2 will suck you right into its intricate, frightening, art deco world. A destroyed Utopia under the sea, terrifying characters and emergent combat make this an unmissable experience.

STRATEGY



EMPIRE: TOTAL WAR

PCZ Issue: 205 – 94%

Vast yet manageable, accessible yet hardcore. All four words and more describe the best Total War game money can currently buy. With the addition of dramatic sea battles and an extended global campaign map, there's simply nothing else with the same grand scope that remains as easy to get into. We feel that the only game that will topple this game from its perch as the best strategy game around will be the next game in the Total War series. It really is that good.



COMPANY OF HEROES

PCZ Issue: 173 – 93%

With this game Relic took the best bits from RTS games and left out the crap, creating a game that's accessible, taxing and exciting. And its expansions *Opposing Fronts* and *Tales of Valor* keep the action coming.



WORLD IN CONFLICT

PCZ Issue: 186 – 92%

A stunning RTS set during the Cold War, offering innovative online play, a solid single-player campaign that combines great gameplay and a good story, jaw-dropping graphics and the best nuclear blast you've seen.



CIVILIZATION IV

PCZ Issue: 162 – 92%

A Buyer's Guide without a Civ game would be a sorry place, and the latest version is the greatest yet. Now with added warmongering and diplomacy in the expansion packs *Warlords* and *Beyond the Sword*.



SINS OF A SOLAR EMPIRE

PCZ Issue 193 – 91%

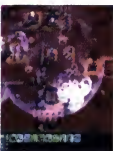
This startling beauty of an RTS seemed to come from nowhere, and quickly converted us from indifferent idiots into grateful idiots by surprising us with accessible complexity.



MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR

PCZ Issue: 175 – 91%

A blend of maniacal plotting on the strategic map and cheering with delight as your warriors collide spectacularly with your opponents' armies. Middle Ages war fun.



SUPREME COMMANDER

PCZ Issue: 179 – 88%

Huge battles of thousands of air, sea and land units? Giant stompy robots and a superb tactical map? One of the most original RTS titles around? Check, check and check.

ACTION/ADVENTURE



GRAND THEFT AUTO IV

PCZ Issue: 203 – 91%

We PC users have had to wait a while (OK – we had to wait a bloody age) before we could return to Liberty City with Niko Bellic, but the delay has been worth it. This version of GTA4 adds graphics that are a cut above those seen on the consoles, expanded multiplayer modes, and an exclusive video editor, to Liberty City's free-roaming world and the sure-to-be-classic storyline of Bellic's American dream becoming an American nightmare.



MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE

PCZ Issue: 136 – 93%

Payne is getting old, but it shows how to do bullet-time right. Noirish tone, a glowering voice-over and remarkable gun action mean that this is still a force to contend with.



GEARS OF WAR

PCZ Issue: 188 – 90%

GOW's tactical battles and toughness make you fear the bullets flying around you. With the climatic Brumak battle, the PC has the best version of this excellent shooter. Shame we'll never see GOW2.



FAHRENHEIT

PCZ Issue: 159 – 90%

Murder most foul, and you're the killer. Fahrenheit boasts a twisting, turning, brilliantly told story, featuring multiple character control, split-screen tension, branching scenes and several endings.



PSYCHONAUTS

PCZ Issue: 156 – 90%

Clever, witty, impeccably detailed and off its rocker – Psychonauts is proof that the anarchic edge of LucasArts hasn't completely left us. A slightly flawed game in some respects, but still a dazzling feat.



BEYOND GOOD & EVIL

PCZ Issue: 138 – 89%

We heap praise on this game on a monthly basis, but it's for a reason. Michel Ancel's superb journey through the strange land of Hillys is nothing short of storytelling magic. It's cheap now, so go out and buy it.



BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM

PCZ Issue 213 : 89%

Proof that licensed superhero games don't have to suck, Arkham Asylum's mix of action, RPG and stealth-em-up play makes it a near classic. The best Batman game we've ever seen.

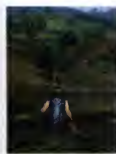
NEW ENTRY!

MMOs



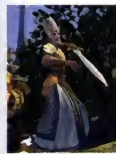
WORLD OF WARCRAFT

PCZ Issue: 152 – 95%
Blizzard's recreation of Azeroth as a living virtual world doesn't disappoint. While its graphics are dated, it's beautiful to watch, absorbing to play and with more content than you can shake a magic stick at.



THE LORD OF THE RINGS ONLINE

PCZ Issue: 182 – 87%
A near-perfect recreation of Tolkien's tales, with solid combat and engaging plots, in a tasty MMO bundle. Meet Gandalf! Play as a hobbit or a spider! Middle-earth awaits...



WARHAMMER ONLINE: AGE OF RECKONING

PCZ Issue: 200 – 92%
Mythic slips *Warhammer* into their realm vs realm template. Even the most reluctant PvPer will launch themselves into huge open warfare, and drop into temporary group quests.



GUILD WARS

PCZ Issue: 156 – 94%
How to make a gaming accessible to the masses. A lot of thought has been applied, and there are no subscription fees. Newbies can feel at home, thanks to a totally skills-based setup.



EVE ONLINE

PCZ Issue: 130 – 88%
Elite Online has been a long-held fantasy for old school gamers, and this space sim has come the closest yet to making it a reality. A slow pace belies the options on offer, from mining to trading to piracy.

SPORT



FOOTBALL MANAGER 2009

PCZ Issue: 202 – 90%
Another season passes and another *Football Manager* appears. New additions to this addictive football sim are a 3D match engine and options to deal with PRs and the media.



PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 2009

PCZ Issue: 201 – 85%
PES lacks official support from the football business fraternity, but that doesn't detract from the game. This year's *PES* provides fun and realistic football, on and offline.



NBA 2K9

PCZ Issue: 203 – 87%
Basketball will never be as popular as football in the sports game stakes, but *NBA 2K9* deserves to be played. This is a superb recreation of America's second-favourite sport that won't disappoint on any front.



FOOTBALL MANAGER LIVE

PCZ Issue: 205 – 85%
All the joy of *Football Manager* with added MMO fun. Build your own team from scratch and develop your manager's skills, to let you take on other managers around the world.



FIFA 08

PCZ Issue: 188 – 80%
A veritable compendium of all that is football, and a good sports game too, the recent *FIFA* still lags behind *PES*, but benefits from layers of EA spit and polish. A decent variant of the beautiful game.

SIMULATION



X3: REUNION

PCZ Issue: 162 – 92%
Finally, a space sim to better *X2: The Threat*, and it just happens to be the sequel. This is possibly the best-looking game ever to appear on a PC. Oh, and it plays pretty well to boot. Why not get reunited with the X Universe?



IL-2 STURMOVIK: FORGOTTEN BATTLES

PCZ Issue: 128 – 92%
While flight sims are getting rarer and rarer, at least the quality remains high. None are more impressive than this ultra-classy WWII combat sim. Chocks away, comrade!



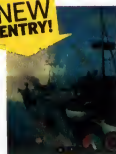
THE SIMS 3

PCZ Issue: 209 – 92%
The Sims 3 is like having your very own reality TV show in your PC, and just as addictive. Near complete freedom of gameplay lets you be a vicious diety, a benevolent dictator, or just a creepy voyeur.



MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR X

PCZ Issue: 175 – 89%
The latest (and maybe final) in the *Flight Simulator* series is the biggest since Microsoft started using actual polygons. What's more, the visuals may just sear your eyeballs.



OPFLASH: DRAGON RISING

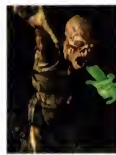
PCZ Issue: 213 – 90%
Like its peer *Arma II*, *OpFlash 2* aims to bring realistic warfare to your PC. But unlike its peer this game doesn't forget it's meant to be fun, not some kind of military training aid.

ROLE-PLAYING



THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION

PCZ Issue: 167 – 95%
Oblivion's sublime graphics, intuitive character-creation and massive freeform gameplay, put paid to the myth that you have to own a beard and live with your mum to enjoy RPGs.



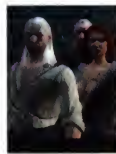
FALLOUT 3

PCZ Issue: 201 – 91%
While it does play like *Oblivion* in a sci-fi skin, this is a great open-world that's just as entertaining if you just wander across Washington state than if you follow the plot. And DLCs are adding to its greatness.



MASS EFFECT

PCZ Issue: 195 – 92%
BioWare's best game since *Knights of the Old Republic*, with a real-time combat system that makes it feel a bit less RPG. Great story, fine action, brilliant dialogue and sex with aliens – it's a modern must.



THE WITCHER

PCZ Issue: 188 – 88%
Adult and intelligent, the world of *The Witcher* is as fascinating as it is violent and corrupt. With an epic story that pushes you into moral dilemmas, this RPG came out of nowhere to revive an ailing genre.



DEUS EX

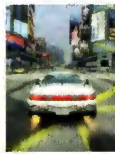
PCZ Issue: 93 – 94%
This is the benchmark in RPGs – if not gaming. A twisting plot, exciting freeform levels and some moments of pure exhilaration and drama ensure *Deus Ex* remains the alpha male of the PC gaming world.

DRIVING/RACING



GTR2

PCZ Issue: 173 – 92%
Pick up this scarily realistic driving sim and race the car of your dreams. It comes with an improved driving model, new game modes and many other improvements. Guaranteed to make you feel like the Stig.



BURNOUT PARADISE: THE ULTIMATE BOX

PCZ Issue: 205 – 89%
This game has set the standard for online arcade racers. Packs more speed than a drug dealer and more fun than slapping a bag full of Jonathan Rosses and Russell Brands.



RACE DRIVER: GRID

PCZ Issue: 195 – 88%
Codemasters moves the series from its historical simulation roots, strips off the TOCA and creates a movie-realistic game with plenty of play modes and global challenges. Kind of like *Burnout*, but with proper tracks.



COLIN MCRÆ: DIRT

PCZ Issue: 183 – 88%
This time the rallying legend treats us to a host of other off-road events, an excitable Travis Pastrana and some of the best-looking graphics to grace any driving game on PC. Time to get down and dirty with a 4x4.



NEED FOR SPEED: SHIFT

PCZ Issue: 213 – 84%
The *Need For Speed* series gets serious. Well, not too serious as the game is still weighed in the favour of fun over realism. But this is a polished release, and the best *NFS* around.

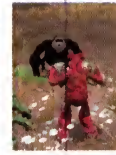
STEVE'S PICK



GARRY'S MOD

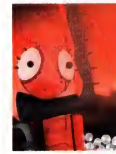
PCZ Issue 179 – 88%
If you want to play *Garry's Mod* on some of the game's more interesting servers (the Goonie Goon Gun servers are where you'll find the most amazing contraptions, in my opinion) you'll have to download about 4GB worth of content. This includes basic building blocks (something missing from the cache of *Source*-engine models shipped with *Garry's Mod*) as well as things like gears (which work as they should), railings along which spheres can roll, bits of jet planes and other very specifically useful objects. You'll also be downloading maps. One of which turns *Garry's Mod* into a space-combat arena, replete with planets you can fly between and explore, some with inhospitable atmospheres, others covered in ice, and all capable of being built on. See if you can construct a spacecraft that can not only deliver you safely to the planet surfaces, but also protect you from the horror-vacuum of space. Or, if you're rubbish at building, simply watch other players carefully and purposefully bolting their inventions together. It's a relaxing pursuit. Guides (and a way of easily downloading that broad range of crap you'll need before you can play online) can be found at ggg.bottlabs.org – though if you can't be bothered with any of that, I implore you to just play about offline with the default gubbins. Even if it's all you can do to put Alyx in sexy poses.

ODDBALL



SPORE

PCZ Issue: 199 – 95%
This is four charming mini-games and an excellent space strategy game, glued together with a bunch of creation kits. It's also a beautiful one-off that is so well-realised that you should experience it yourself.



WORLD OF GOO

PCZ Issue 201 – 90%
A stroke of indie genius, *World of Goo* is a puzzler in which you erect fantastic goo-based structures across a myriad of unique and intriguing levels. Novel at every turn, this indie title is simply irresistible.



PORTAL

PCZ Issue: 187 – 89%
Ingenious and absurdly funny, *Portal* is a four-hour slice of perfect puzzles and discovery. Hurling yourself through floors and walls sounds odd, but modern games are rarely more delightful.



GARRY'S MOD

PCZ Issue: 179 – 88%
The God game-like *Garry's Mod* gives you the tools to create almost anything you can think of in the *Source* engine, from working robots to saucy ragdoll JPEGs. Fun and easy to use, try it out and see for yourself.



BRAID

PCZ Issue: 209 – 90%
Braid is extremely pretentious, but extremely well made, with time-bending twists that'll provide a challenge to new and veteran platformers. It also has a secret editor for making your own levels.

RICHARD'S PICK



THE WITCHER

PCZ Issue 188 – 88%
Being an old-time P&P RPGer – the kind which involves rolling funny shaped dice and talking to real-life people in person – I've always enjoyed CRPGs. But none have met my expectations since *Baldur's Gate II*. That is until *The Witcher* arrived. This game from then-unknown CD Projekt was plainly stunning: based on Andrzej Sapkowski's original reworkings of fairy tales and standard Tolkien tropes, this game featured intense tactical combat, drugs, sex, and – most importantly – a damn good story. *The Witcher*'s setting is a world where morality is a complex, shifting mass that lacks any clear definitions of good and evil. This is a world where an anthro is the good guy by default. By forcing you to choose between taking the side of medieval Nazis, literally human terrorists, or staying out of the conflict and allowing a civil war to break out, *The Witcher* forces you consider your actions and their effects. And not just on the wider world – each choice you're offered has a personal consequence for you in the game: help a woman out early in the game, and you make an enemy. And boy were there a lot of women. In various states of nakedness. As well as threesomes with eager nurses. Yes, *The Witcher* is a truly great game.

INCOMING!

Want to know what's coming out? Then turn to page 20 for the full run-down.

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PCZONE Hardware

Better gaming through technology



ONE TUESDAY...

I'D BEEN TO look at Google for the price of a old Athlon 4800+. From a quick glance of the results I saw the average price across retailers and eBay was somewhere between £30 and £40.

What I didn't do was check the socket type, because while the AM2 processor is plentiful, the Socket 939 variant is rarer than a royal flush. And the 939 pin chip costs at least £100 more. Reader Stefano Fiorentini took me to task for this error appearing in last issue's *Dear Wendy*.

Sure I'd made a boo-boo, but the huge price difference did add weight to my argument that upgrading dead technology isn't worth it: when a cheap modern board and cheap modern chip will leave yesterday's flagship products in the dust, it's best to either start afresh or be satisfied with what you have.

But let's move on.

Later that week, I bought a 26in vented sliding shelf for a rack-mounted server chassis. The checkout process for it was as familiar as an installation wizard: an endless parade of next buttons best traversed with rapid clicks. Even my credit card details were stored, so my fingers didn't need to move from the mouse.

My hurry caused my colleagues some consternation a few days later when an entire pallet of them appeared at reception. Yes, you guessed it: I'd managed to buy 26 of them.

As always, the internet makes you stupid.

Wendy

Phil Wand
Hardware editor

RAMPANT RADEONS

Two new 5800-series cards crowned king of their respective hills

IT'S NOT OFTEN you see NVIDIA going home nursing not one but two black eyes, after their arch rival having landed two good punches.

The launch of AMD's 5800-series knocked the green team out of the ring with the new fastest single processor card on sale, the £299 Radeon 5870. Soon after came the smaller but equally feisty £199 Radeon 5850, priced to undercut the GeForce 285 by £30, yet delivering performance on a par with it.

But it's more than a victory of value. The 5870 and 5850 are both DirectX 11 cards, meaning they've become the default choice for any Windows 7 gamer with £199 or more to spend. DirectX 11 will bring a noticeably leap in quality, and choosing a good DX11-capable card



The £299 VNB100 goes straight to the top of the book pile.



will give it portability, too: it's an item you'll take with you from your current system to the next, rather than something you stick on eBay.

The 5870 and 5850 are also available at your favourite retailer today, whereas NVIDIA's much-awaited fight back – the mystery GeForce 300-series – won't be on shelves until after Christmas. So if your budget is

£200, the answer is simple: Radeon 5850. If you can stretch to £100 more, it's simple too. And get dreaming about the 5870 X2.
game.amd.com

TRUER IMAGE

Our favourite backup tool returns

YOU'VE HEARD OF True Image, our favourite backup tool that snapshots your disk so that you can save and restore an exact duplicate of your system in the event of problems.

True Image Home 2010 adds bells and whistles to that functionality. This new version provides automatic, live incremental backups, meaning your system is continually backed up.



Windows 7 users will also be able to boot from their backup image, making it easy compare different system settings and drivers, and every purchase comes with 2GB storage at Acronis Online Backup (acronis.com), meaning there's no more need to fill up local drives with your backup images.

The full version is £39.95 and the upgrade is £23.95.
acronis.com

NEWS ROUND-UP

MICROSOFT HAS PUT the final touches on *Windows 7's XP Mode*, and will make it available as a download after the OS' October launch. Please don't forget that *XP Mode* is aimed at businesses, not home users: I still see gamers talking like it'll make the transition easy for them. It won't.
microsoft.com

"HIGHLIGHTED WASD KEYS made for gaming: Gamers can find the direction keys as quickly as possible when the action gets hot and heavy, giving them an edge when fractions of a second matter." MSI do talk nonsense but the new i7-based GT640 laptop which has this feature is supposedly the most powerful portable PC on sale.
msi.com

**WARNING:
THIS MONTH'S
HARD WORDS**
BY RICHARD COSGROVE

WASD: A yell of greeting made between gamers, mainly of the male American FPS obsessive variety. Proper usage: "WASD MATE!"
HYPERTHREADING: One of a growing number of household chores re-imagined as an extreme sport. Combines elements of free-running, free climbing, and darning. "MADE A BOO-BOO": Polite English expression, usually used by pre-schoolers until they learn the meaning of SNAFU. **HD-DVD:** High-capacity DVD format that's been killed off by widespread industry support for Blu-ray. Microsoft remains in denial about this format's failure, so continue to support it. **X2 939:** A CPU that makes Wendy look a bit foolish.



PROBLEMS?

Mistook your wardrobe for the toilet again? Local shop stopped stocking your favourite blue-flavoured Pringles? Been playing *World of Warcraft* so long your partner's left you? We can't help with those setbacks (no, not even the Mighty Wandy), but we can solve all your hardware hassles. Wandy knows everything, and he's willing to help if you email him at: wandy@dearwandy.com, including as much information about your problem as you can and system specs where applicable.



The Q9550 is the best value processor on sale today, but sadly some mobos won't support it.

DRIVER WATCH

GRAPHICS

MANU	DESC	RELEASED
ATI	CATALYST 9.9	11 Sep 09
NVIDIA	Force Ware 190.62	21 Aug 09

SOUND

MANU	DESC	RELEASED
Creative	X-Fi Beta 2.18.0004	30 Jul 08
Creative	Creative Alchemy 1.20.04	01 Aug 08
Creative	Audigy Beta 2.18.0001	17 Jul 08

Dear Wandy

If it ain't broke, don't fix it. If it ain't working, don't panic...

Q HARD ASROCK

I have an ASRock 939NF6G-VSTA with AMD Athlon 64 X2 4400+ (939 pin), 4GB RAM and a GeForce 8800 GTS, running *Windows 7*. I mainly play *EVE Online* but recently I bought *Fallout 3* and *BioShock*. I'm looking longingly at demanding games like *Modern Warfare 2* and I'm worried that my computer just won't cut it.

If my current system is a dead loss, could I get anything half-decent that will play these games for say £650? I already have a good monitor. Basically I want the cheapest decent upgrade that is possible.

Joe Trelford

A This is a similar tale to that of Gordon Flynn in issue 213. He had a Gigabyte GA-K8N51GMF-9 board with 4000+ processor, and my advice to him was to hunt around on eBay for a Athlon 64 X2 4800+ chip as it shouldn't cost much more than £135.

You have the same ceiling as Gordon, but unlike him you'd not notice the difference between the processor you have now and its replacement. So I'd not bother. In addition, the old GTS is a top-value card and I'd be inclined to draw a line under your system and leave it – anything else will be a fool's errand.

If you want to spend £650 on screwing together a new PC yourself I'd suggest using a Core 2 Quad Q9550, 4GB of DDR2-800 RAM, and if you've been happy with your ASRock and aren't concerned with overclocking, CrossFire or RAID, go for the its G31M-GS because it's cheap and just works.

So far we've spent £170 on the chip, £45 on memory and £35 on the board. I'd spend a further £100 on a small solid-state drive such as OCZ's 30GB Agility for your OS, with another £35 on a 500GB hard drive for your music, movies and games. That leaves you around £350 remaining for a graphics card that'll blow your face off, though I would suggest exercising caution here.

We're about to see a new line-up of DirectX 11-capable cards appear, so anything you buy now will be defunct



It only exists in leaked photos, but cards like the Radeon HD 5870 will soon be on shelves.

come Christmas, so scavenge that GTS and in a few weeks buy the baddest, most crazy-arsed Radeon 5800 or GeForce GT300 series card you can afford. This is sure to absorb everything you have left.

Q DO NOTHING

I'm a gamer and primarily play FPSs. My Xworks X8i-C2Q rig (eVGA 122-CK-NF68 mainboard, Core 2 Quad Q6600, two 8800 GTX cards in SLI, and 4GB RAM) is two years old, but one of the 8800s has failed. As the system runs games to my requirement, so I don't want to do the big upgrade until the next *Crysis* comes. Finding a replacement 8800 is hard and I'll be using technology two generations old. So I was thinking of going for a GTX 280, 285 or 295.

Is there any reason I shouldn't use such a GPU in this system? Is my 850W SilverStone ST85ZF PSU up to it, and can the case take the length and heat as I've heard they run hot? The 295 looks the best card and I can afford it, but is it worth it? I have £400 to spend but the missus will kill me if I get it wrong!

Martin Benton

A Xworks use Antec's P180B which will easily swallow anything on your shopping list. My experience of the old GTX is that it actually runs between 5°C and 10°C hotter than a new GTX 295, but heat only becomes an issue when you go for one of the pre-tweaked designs such as BFG's GTX 280 – this mother runs close to boiling point.

If you're genuinely not bothered about hosing £400 on a video card, the GTX 295 is the only way to go and your PSU will be able to feed it. But, as I've already said, its DX11 replacement is due before the New Year so you'd be wise keeping all the cash in your bank.

Can you tinker in the meantime? No, not really. Your eVGA board doesn't support Yorkfield CPUs such as the Q9550, so to keep four cores you need to buy one of the Extreme Edition chips that are out of your budget. And while you could buy two GTX 260s for less than £300, as someone who's familiar with the performance of two 8800 GTXs it's simply not worth it. In short, don't do anything.

Q ALL ABOARD

I've recently purchased the wonderful game of *Prototype*. I rushed home and installed it. After the long time it took to install I booted it up and set

"Its DX11 replacement is due, so keep all the cash in your bank"

"What you're suggesting is within the bounds of possibility, but it isn't within reach of most users"

about tweaking with the controls. I then realised I had no sound. After a reinstall and survey of forums I found I wasn't alone in my struggle. Solutions range from new drivers to dropping the hardware acceleration or even moving the sound files – none of which worked.

Now it's not just *Prototype* with the issue. The new *Section 8* beta has the same problem after the intro scene. The main menu and game have no sound at all, yet everyone I know with the game has perfect audio.

I'm running on *Windows XP SP3* with an Xtreme Gamer sound card.

Richard Plews

A My advice to anyone with Sound Blaster-related issues is to pull the sound card out and use your motherboard's integrated soundcard. Your aural experience will be reduced, but you won't suffer any further hair loss. The Dxdiag report you sent revealed that your ASUS board has integrated SoundMAX HD, so cut your losses and use that.

Personally, I'd leave both cards connected and enabled, and then switch to the SoundMAX in the Control Panel whenever you play affected games.

That said, as *Prototype* has so many well-documented problems means I'd not waste any more time on it.

Q LAPPY BOOST

I have an HP TouchSmart IQ790.uk with a Turion 64 x2 TL-60 and



Prototype has great sound. When it works.

onboard graphics, and would like to upgrade it. I think the rest of the PC is capable of running a higher specification card, but I'm unable to do this easily as there are no useable internal slots because of the chassis limitations.

I'm a hardware engineer and was thinking about using a ribbon cable with an edge connector strip attached to one end and an edge connector socket on the other, plugged into the graphics card slot on the motherboard, then running this cable to an externally mounted card.

Do you think that this would work, or am I not going to be able to run all of the lovely new games that I want to play and have already purchased? I own several other desktops and laptops as I run a home business, but the HP is the most appropriate one to use for games.

Mick Neeve

A What you're suggesting is within the bounds of possibility, but it isn't within reach of most users. In short, it's probably not going to work.

Let's look at your setup: the TouchSmart has an ASUS A8SN-CF mobo with PCI-Express x16 interface and NVIDIA MXM connector.

In theory, there is nothing preventing you sourcing an MXM extender from a dubious-looking Hong Kong-based eBay seller and a PCIe riser card, then hacking about some old 80-pin IDE ribbon cables that anyone who's ever built their own PC has kicking about.

Solder one end of the ribbon to the MXM extender, the other to the riser, and the job's done. Except the hurdles you'll encounter – soldering hundreds of tiny connections, getting power to the external bus, that sort of thing – will be mere blips on the project radar compared to the Godzilla-sized shape of MXM and your PC's processor.

ALL ABOUT...

21 NAS

Seems you can't move for external storage products in high street stores these days. But what if you need data that every PC in the house can get at? That's where choosing NAS, or Network Attached Storage, makes more sense.

NAS is accessible anywhere on the network, though most come with security settings that allow you to create users and groups and set file permissions.

High-end NAS devices feature multiple drives for redundancy and often very expensive, but you can also buy home and small office products for £399 or less, though not all come supplied with hard drives. These still have their own processor, memory and operating system, all things that make a NAS far more than just a remote bit bucket.

Popular brands you've won't have heard of include Thecus, Qnap and Synology. Household names are also getting in on the action, Seagate offering good value with their BlackArmor line and Western Digital with their My Book World Edition.

Our recommendation for a good quality, seriously fast home NAS product would be the £389 QNAP TS-239 Pro.



HP's EX487 MediaSmart Server is fast and cheap but unavailable to UK buyers.

While MXM is ostensibly a laptop user's wet dream, in reality it's far more of a money-saving device for manufacturers, and that asthmatic AMD CPU will put most modern titles out of reach anyway.

If I were you, I'd give up. What you really need is something ready-made like an external PCI-Express cable, and as far as I know such a thing only exists in draft specifications.

When you think about it, allowing notebook users to plug in desktop graphics solutions would kill a significant proportion of sales in the enthusiast PC market. If people could renew the graphics on their notebook PC with a new GPU card, there'd be no need to buy new portable PCs. In other words, every hardware maker on the planet plans on you feeling disappointed

by your purchase three years from the day you unpack it.

Q BLAME GOOGLE

I felt I had to contact your magazine after reading *X2: The Treat* in last issue's *Dear Wandy*. It advises a reader to upgrade their AMD 939 CPU to a X2 939 4800, as it'll cost as around £35. To my knowledge such a CPU is rare and commands £100 on eBay.

Stefano Fiorentini

A You're right. I identified the right replacement, but my Google research turned up the price for an AM2 equivalent. The 939-pin chip is £100 more expensive than I quoted.

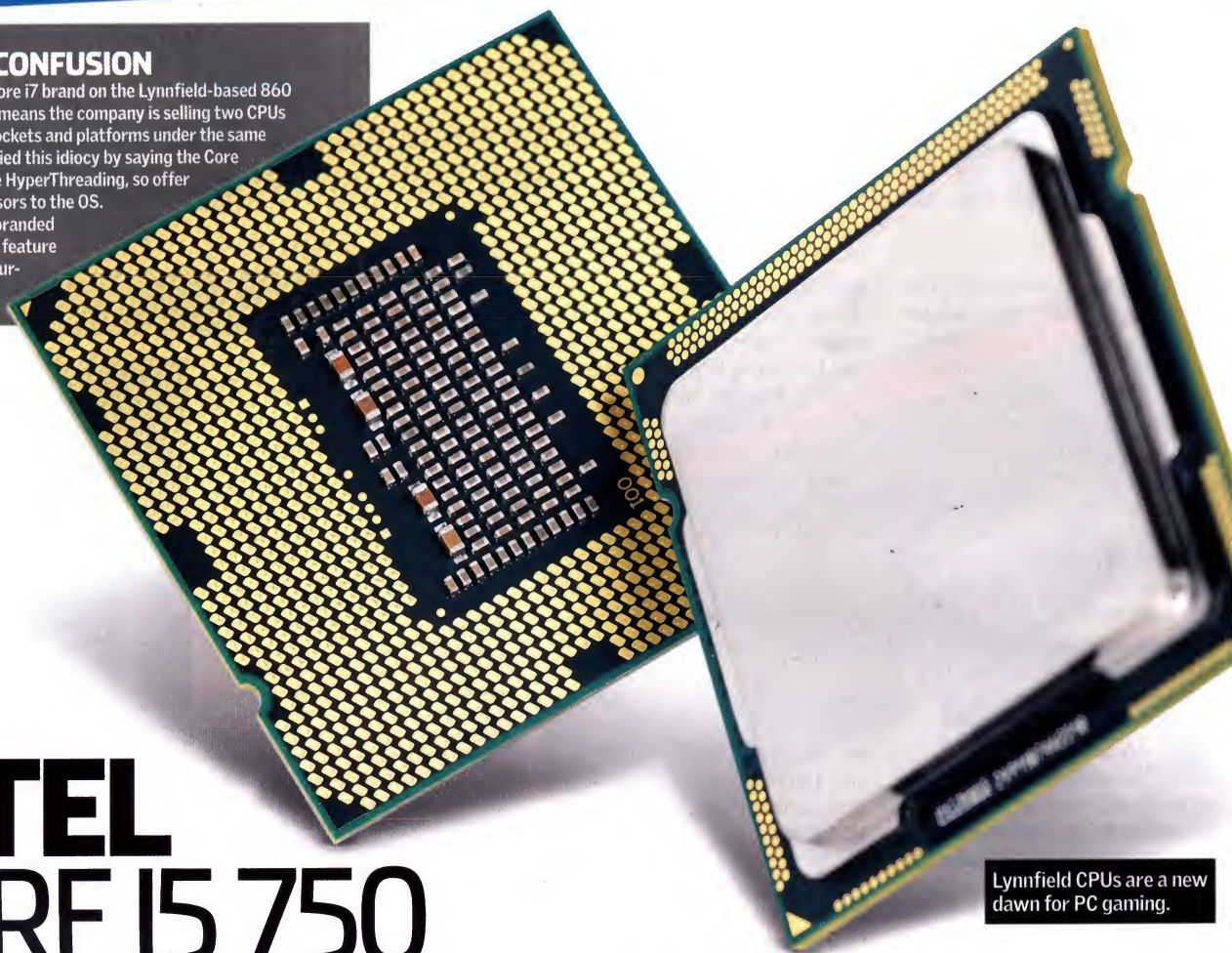
So the real answer to the original problem is not to upgrade the chip at all. **PCZ**

FORUMS:
DIRECT FROM
DEARWANDY.COM

(The Gidfather) I've decided what laptop I want to buy: the Acer Aspire 5739G-654G32MN. A few sites like acerdirect.co.uk and simplyacer.co.uk offer it for £599, with a one-year manufacturer's warranty or an option to upgrade to a three-year one. John Lewis sells it for £650 with a two-year warranty and the option to purchase and return to store. What's the best option? (Rich) I doubt John Lewis have a qualified team of laptop repair experts in each store, so they'll just be sending it off somewhere else anyway, so it would take just as long as sending it to Acer directly. (Wandy) Neither AcerDirect nor SimplyAcer are in any way connected with Acer. They would just have you think that.

BRANDED CONFUSION

Intel has used the Core i7 brand on the Lynnfield-based 860 and 870 CPUs. This means the company is selling two CPUs that use different sockets and platforms under the same name. They've justified this idiocy by saying the Core i7 branded CPUs use HyperThreading, so offer eight logical processors to the OS. Meanwhile Core i5 branded processors lack this feature so are quad-core, four-thread CPUs.



Lynnfield CPUs are a new dawn for PC gaming.

INTEL CORE i5 750 INTEL CORE i7 870

PRICE £150 (i5 750), £450 (i7 870) MANUFACTURER Intel WEBSITE intel.co.uk

INTEL'S NEW LYNNFIELD-class CPUs – aka the Core i5 range – make existing Bloomfield Core i7 processors seem rather redundant. These CPUs are based on the Nehalem design used in the Bloomfield Core i7 processors that were launched last year, but sport a few changes.

Significantly, the Lynnfield chips have built-in PCI Express 2.0 controllers that supports CrossFire and SLI tech. While this is a welcome bonus to gamers, the 16-lane setup means it can only handle two cards. But still, that's more than enough for most but the

hardest of hardcore gamers. The additional inclusion of other systems, including memory controller and I/O systems, means these CPUs don't need a northbridge interface, freeing up space on motherboards.

CONFUSION REIGNS

There are three Lynnfield-based processors available: the 2.66GHz Core i5 750; 2.8GHz Core i7 860; and the 2.93GHz Core i7 870.

They're cheaper than equivalent Bloomfields, with the entry-level Core i5 750 costing just £150. The Core i7 870 is £450 – pricey, but a few hundred cheaper than an equivalent Bloomfield CPU when they were launched. But despite the price hike, the i7 870 isn't great value – generally it runs 5% faster than the i7 860, but costs 50% more.

While these Lynnfields use the same cores and cache memory as the older Bloomfields, it's their new dual-channel DDR3 memory controller that

makes them fast. We're not sure how Intel have managed this, but these CPUs attain unfeasibly high bandwidths. At 1,333MHz the Lynnfields can deliver 16-17GB per second of data throughput: very close to the triple-channel Bloomfield Core i7's bandwidth. And

increase) and the Core i5 750 to 2.8GHz (a 140MHz jump).

The Core i7 850 and 870 CPUs are fitted equipped with HyperThreading. For some applications – like 3D graphics rendering – this black magic can deliver a 20% speed boost. However, it can

"Over all the Core i5 750 is as good as any processor currently available for gaming PCs"

get the right DDR3 DIMMs, bandwidth above 20GBps is possible.

On top of this these chips have two other speed boosters: Turbo Boost and HyperThreading. All three of these new CPUs have a Turbo function that, Intel says, can deliver another 666MHz of speed, depending on the cooling system. However, in our tests the i7 870 refused to go higher than 3.2GHz (a 270MHz

have a negative impact on a computer's performance when it's used for gaming, even if the developers have optimised their game to make use of this feature.

Overall the Core i5 750 is as good as any processor currently available for gaming PCs. But your machine isn't just used for games, the Core i7 860 chip provides much better value-for-money than the i7 870. **JL**

SPECIFICATION

	CORE i5 750	CORE i7 870
SPEED	2.66GHz	2.93GHz
CACHE	8MB L3	8MB L3
SOCKET	LGA 1156	LGA 1156
SCORE	91	72



The Fei-Dao (left) and Achilles (right) are Core i5 gaming PCs.

ADVANCETEC FEI-DAO CYBERPOWER INFINITY I5 ACHILLES

PRICE £1,000 (Fei-Dao) £1,000 (Achilles) MANUFACTURER AdvanceTec, CyberPower WEBSITE advancetec.co.uk, cyberpowersystem.co.uk

INTEL'S CORE I5 processors allow you to get graphical excellence for £1,000 with little compromise, making them the chips gamers have been waiting for. These two PCs from AdvanceTec and CyberPower are proof of this.

The graphics cards inside these AdvanceTec and CyberPower machines are more than a match for each other. The 4890 in the Achilles is the superior card, but will only ever give a frame rate advantage in single figures over the Fei-Dao's 4870. However, these PCs represent each company's priorities, rather than their technical superiority.

The CyberPower machine is the best all-round package, coming with a crisp

22in Hanns.G monitor and Logitech mouse and keyboard thrown in. It also has the superior ATI card and a 1GHz factory overclock.

AdvanceTec's Fei-Dao is an early model, so comes at the Core i5's stock speed and an Intel reference cooler. We expect to see overclocked versions from AdvanceTec soon, but the i5's overclocking potential is there. We managed to get it up to a stable 3.5GHz with the stock cooler in no time at all.

Performance wise, the CyberPower rig comes out tops all the way along thanks to that heady guaranteed overclock and the superior graphics card. It's only the fairly GPU-reliant *Far Cry 2* that keeps the two machines close

in benchmark tests, but playing the more CPU-intensive *World in Conflict* and *Arma II*, shows the Achilles' overclocked i5 definitely has the edge. That said, when we overclocked the Fei-Dao its results matched the Achilles'.

Where the Fei-Dao has an advantage is in storage. While the

Achilles has a 750GB hard disk drive and a DVD-RW performing optical duties, the Fei-Dao has a 32GB OCZ solid state drive for *Windows* and a 1TB hard disk drive for general storage. It's also got a Blu-ray/HD-DVD combi drive.

CORE, WHAT PCS!

So, factory overclocking aside, things come down whether you need the full Fei-Dao package. After all that SSD and Blu-ray drive could be dropped, and the money saving put towards a better GPU. Especially one of the upcoming 5-series DirectX 11 cards from ATI.

While these are both well-specced and well-performing machines, representing what we can expect from the next generation of £1,000 rigs, right now we're being asked for more cash than we ought for a Lynnfield PC. The P55 motherboards have fewer components and are simpler to manufacture than their X58 brethren, so soon we should see the P55 motherboards dropping well below £100, and with the new generation of

SPEED TESTS (FPS)

	ADVANCETEC FEI-DAO	CYBERPOWER INFINITY I5
ARMA II*	17	20
FAR CRY 2**	50	52
WORLD IN CONFLICT**	41	50

* Real world ** Benchmark tests

GPUs coming next month, prices could drop even lower on today's graphics cards. So in a few months and some more efficient spec'ing, both machines could be end up hitting the £800 mark.

But until then the CyberPower Achilles machine is where things are at. The guarantee that comes with the factory overclock gives you peace of mind, and the performance that comes with it will allow you to take care of anything that comes your way. The added bonus of the bright 22in screen and the keyboard, mouse and speaker sets makes the it the more superior of the two. **DJ**

SPECIFICATION

	ADVANCETEC FEI-DAO	CYBERPOWER INFINITY I5
CLOCK SPEED	2.6GHz	3.6GHz
CPU	Core i5 750	Core i5 750
GPU	Sapphire HD4870 1GB	PowerColor HD4890 1GB
RAM	4GB Corsair DDR3	4GB G-Skill DDR3
STORAGE	32GB OCZ Core SSD, 1TB Samsung HDD	750GB HDD
SCORE	92	82

"We're being asked for more cash than we ought for a Lynnfield PC"

REMEMBER:
YOU DON'T NEED
TO WEAR TIN FOIL
HATS USING WI-FI

If you use a wi-fi router it's a good idea to turn them off occasionally, as they're not designed to run continually. It's not to protect yourself from being irradiated by the radio signals they use to deliver the internet connection created by a modem to a PC.

Hardware Buyer

This is our favourite PC gear – both expensive and cheap

LOADED?

GRAPHICS

ZOTAC GEFORCE GTX 295

PRICE £436

zotac.com

The current king of the hill is this giant dual-GPU board from NVIDIA. That ridiculously large heatsink covers two 280 chips running side-by-side. And it's not just faster than AMD's 4870X2 (its nearest rival), but it's also a lot more energy efficient. Good news, as the 4870X2 is currently propping up the share prices of several major electricity companies.



PROCESSOR

INTEL CORE I7 965

PRICE £839

intel.com



Intel's latest processing powerhouse doesn't just have four cores with which to throw your games around, it also support hyperthreading for running even more simultaneous processes without affecting framerates. The upshot: there's not a game in the world that this will struggle with.

SCREEN

NEC 24WMGX3

PRICE £529

onec.com



If we had the money we'd fritter it on this incredible 27in screen from NEC. Picture quality is simply unrivalled, and it's got so many input options it's the subject of at least three web fetish sites. Size queens will always go for something larger, and that would be lavishly decadent too.

MOTHERBOARD

ASUS RAMPAGE II EXTREME

PRICE £321

asus.com



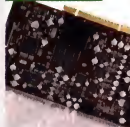
This Core i7-friendly board sports the X58 Intel chipset and everything else you can imagine. It's the deluxe department store of motherboard design, hawking bespoke capacitor design and expertly tuned performance pathways, to the sleazy suburban joys of three-way SLI.

SOUND CARD

AUZENTECH X-FI PRELUDE 7.1

PRICE £144

auzentech.com



Take a top-of-the-range Creative X-Fi audio chip and surround it with components of such a high grade they're spoken of only in hushed tones by those in the know, and then add Dolby Digital Live – you'd have a pretty cool sound card, right? Actually, you'd end up with this one.

HDD

SEAGATE BARRACUDA 7200.11

PRICE £99

seagate.com



If we're talking money no object, then we'd couple this with a solid-state drive from Samsung for maximum performance and storage, but if our loaded rig was limited to one hard disk, it would be this one. A huge 1.3TB of storage and a performance unmatched by any other vanilla HDD.

SPEAKERS

LOGITECH Z-5500

PRICE £195

logitech.co.uk



The price has dropped below £200 and these speakers are simply the best we've ever tested. The soundtracks from both games and movies ravish your ears, and you'll soon find yourself dusting off your old CDs just so you can sit in the middle of the sound and revel in it.

SKINT?

GRAPHICS

SAPPHIRE HD4850

PRICE £120

sapphiretech.com

This is the card that had arch-rival NVIDIA slashing prices in an effort to be competitive. Just £120 buys you a mainstream monster with performance that matches a GeForce 9800 GTX and snaps at the heels of the new N280GTX. Put the magazine down and buy one.



PROCESSOR

INTEL CORE 2 DUO E2180

PRICE £44

intel.com



At the budget end of things, it's a tough choice between the E2180, E4500 and E8200 processors from Intel. It's not surprising that things get faster the more you pay, but the E2180 here is a flexible engine that's great for gentle gaming or an overclocking frenzy.

MOTHERBOARD

ASROCK CONROEXFIRE-ESATA2

PRICE £60

asrock.com



Paired with an E6300, this ASRock motherboard can wring high-end performance from a budget rig. It features a 1066/800/533MHz FSB, SATA II with RAID, 7.1 HD audio onboard, CrossFire support, Gigabit LAN and ASRock's easy overclocking features.

HDD

WESTERN DIGITAL CAVIAR 1600AAJS

PRICE £30

wdc.com



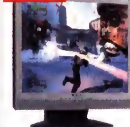
A 160GB hard drive, like this SATA 2 model, remains more than enough for the casual gamer to do a spot of casual gaming. A few good titles, Steam, a couple of thousand music files and the odd porn flick still leaves plenty of room for Windows to manoeuvre.

SCREEN

VIEWSONIC VA903M

PRICE £118

viewsoniceurope.com



The VA903m is a better bet than any of the similarly-priced widescreen variants as there are more pixels on its 19in screen: its 1280 x 1024 pixel panel offers greater depth than the standard 1440 x 900 panels of its peers, although it can't handle native widescreen resolutions.

SOUND CARD

CREATIVE LABS SOUND BLASTER AUDIGY 2 VALUE

PRICE £20

uk.europe.creative.com



The cheap Audigy card features EAX 4.0 and Dolby Digital EX support. This card makes an awful lot of sense for casual gamers, as there's little point throwing half a mortgage payment at your soundcard, unless you're an audiophile, or you want your PC to act as a top-class music system.

SPEAKERS

LOGITECH X-530

PRICE £55

logitech.co.uk



Logitech's X-530s have the edge on quality and are available just about everywhere. This Swiss-designed 70W, 5.1 surround sound system offers Logitech build quality with superb sound in games, movies and music. And their value can't be beat, giving sound quality above their price bracket.

THE WORLD'S NUMBER ONE PC GAMES MAGAZINE

**FREE
DVD**

10 MASSIVE DEMOS!

INCLUDING FIFA 10 » NEED FOR SPEED: SHIFT »
CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER » PES 2010 » MORE...



THE WORLD'S **NUMBER ONE** PC GAMES MAGAZINE

PC GAMER

WORLD'S FIRST REVIEW

DRAGON AGE ORIGINS

"IT'S THE RPG OF
THE DECADE"

MODERN WARFARE 2

20 REASONS TO PLAY THE
ULTIMATE PC SHOOTER

VALVE EXCLUSIVE!

CLOWN ZOMBIES!

INSIDE LEFT 4 DEAD 2'S
CIRCUS OF HORROR

WINDOWS 7

MORE FEATURES INSIDE

- » **BORDERLANDS**: the first review
- » Essential **PROCESSOR** upgrades tested!
- » Living with **WINDOWS 7**

**TURN OVER
FOR MORE...**

**148
PAGES**
THE BEST PC
MAG JUST GOT
BIGGER!

THE HOTTEST PC GAMES

SPLINTER CELL
CONVICTION
ASSASSIN'S CREED 2
SILENT HUNTER 5
DC UNIVERSE ONLINE
ELEMENTAL
WAR OF MAGIC

FOOTBALL MANAGER

A FRESH START
FOR THE OLD PRO

PLUS
CHAMPIONSHIP
MANAGER 2010

LEFT 4 DEAD 2
Valve reveal gory campaign secrets

PC GAMER

**DVD
ROM**

NEED FOR SPEED SHIFT

RACE AROUND LONDON!

**10
PLAYABLE
DEMOS**

PES 10
A FOOTBALL
HERO RETURNS

AND MUCH MORE...

CHAMPIONSHIP
MANAGER 2010
ZUMA'S REVENGE
AAAH! A RECKLESS
DISREGARD FOR
GRAVITY
RUNES OF MAGIC

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PLAY THE WORLD'S
BEST CLUBS

Indie Games: The best from The
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Extra: Essential patches,
marvellous mouse, stunning mods,
the best cheats, galleries and more

79 PAGES OF REVIEWS AND PREVIEWS!

BIG NEW GAMES

Splinter Cell: Conviction,
Assassin's Creed II, Silent
Hunter 5, Men of War: Red
Tide, DC Universe Online,
Dead Rising 2, more...

BEST REVIEWS

Aion, Borderlands, Operation
Flashpoint: Dragon Rising,
Lucidity, PES 2010, FEAR 2:
Reborn, Need for Speed:
Shift, Tropico 3, more...

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Buy it now www.myfavouritemagazines.co.uk/gamesradarshop



PCZONE

Freeplay

For the man who has nothing

DAVIDLESS

THOSE WONDERING WHY there's an unfamiliar face staring out at you needn't despair. David hasn't left PC ZONE unannounced. He's just a bit broken and needs to spend some time off his feet.

As a result, you've ended up with me instead. Fresh off the plane from five weeks in the US, free games are actually a pleasant surprise. My biggest gripe about America was its hidden charges. No price tag has tax added, so as soon as you reach the checkout, it becomes apparent that you've been deceived. That's not forgetting the tipping – a customary practice that's basically law Stateside. So arriving back in good old Blighty was a Godsend for my wallet. Especially when I get the pleasure of writing Freeplay and revelling in the amount of free stuff bursting from its pages.

But, like the US' love of concealed costs, the most interesting news is the closure of free-to-play *Dungeon Runners*, especially when *D&D Online* has chosen to go free. It's difficult to suggest the right route for new MMOs. *World of Warcraft* has the subscription market stitched up, so free gaming and micro transactions) is the only other legitimate choice.

Do you find yourselves playing F2P MMOs and actually buying the good items for real money? I certainly don't and I doubt others do. Does this mean F2P games are doomed from the start? *Guild Wars* suggests otherwise, but it will be interesting to see how the pricing develops as MMOs begin to go multiplatform.

M FiW

Marco Fiori
Acting David Brown

Get to da Chopper!



NEW CAMPAIGN 4 EVERYONE

Crash Course DLC bridges *L4D*'s gaps

WEBSITE l4d.com

VALVE HAVE STUCK two fingers up at the *Left 4 Dead 2* boycott groups by announcing some DLC for *Left 4 Dead*. *Crash Course* brings a new campaign that's playable in all three of the game's modes: Co-op, Versus and Survival.

Narrative wise, Valve are hoping to tie together the *No Mercy* and *Death Toll* campaigns, and answer some of the questions that gamers have been asking, while bringing a much-needed sense of continuity to the game. Naturally we're hoping for Valve's trademark cinematic touch, as your rescue helicopter drops out of the sky and it becomes apparent that you'll once again have to fight your way through the hordes.

We can't wait to hear what banter Valve come up with, but we're not

looking forward to the inevitable whining by children in Versus mode.

Thankfully, anyone crying about balancing (here's looking at you David...) will lack the ammo to do so. Valve are streamlining the Versus experience, aiming to make the mode last a mere 30 minutes by adding a recharge timer for the infected.

Gabe Newell gave fans even more reason to celebrate, announcing that Valve were fully committed to the original title's "ongoing entertainment value". This can only mean more content before November's release of *L4D2*. We've got our fingers crossed that it also

hints towards the two games integrating. Valve are still remaining quiet about what form *L4D2* will arrive in, but the revelation of *L4D* content can only bolster rumours that a standalone expansion pack system, like *Company of Heroes*, may be used.

Still, since the release of the SDK and influx of user created maps, (some of which rival Valve's level of quality control), is there actually any need for Valve to spend time on the original, especially with the sequel so close to release? Is *Crash Course* just another PR stunt to quieten the naysayers? We'll be the judge of that.



"Is *Crash Course* just another PR stunt to quieten the naysayers?"

PCZONE
FREE-O-METER



Not free!

0
HOURS

*Approximate amount of completely free stuff this month



Free!

851
HOURS*



P-P-PORTAL FACE

ASCII Portal gets up close and pixelated

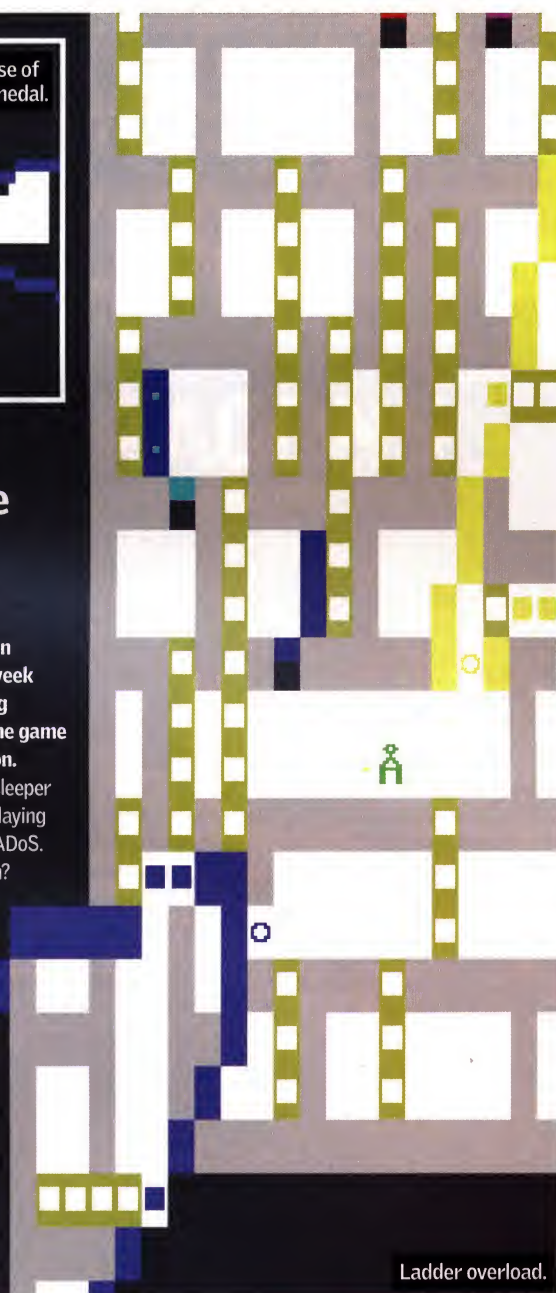
WEBSITE cymongames.com/asciiportal

THIS FREWARE TITLE is the brainchild of Cymon Games, a project that aims to create a game-a-week while supplying the source code to teach budding programmers. This isn't a weekly entry, but a standalone game that lead programmer, Joe Larson has procrastinated on.

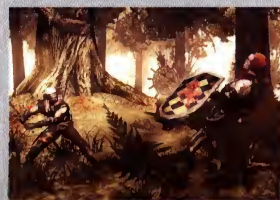
ASCII Portal takes its obvious inspiration from Valve's sleeper hit *Portal*. Like its big brother, the ASCII version has you playing a test subject that's tormented by psychotic computer, GLADoS. What more could a fan of *Portal* ask for from a free version? Except for *Portal 2*.

But we digress. There are miniature Companion Cubes, GLADoS' sick sense of humour (complete with low bit-rate sound effects) and mind-bending puzzles that are made even more complicated by the ASCII coding. They'll surely cause you to reevaluate the concept of what's up and down while holding your aching head.

It's not even over once you've completed the game. The developers have also included a feature to let players create their own custom maps. A forum has been set up so the community can share its creations so be sure to head over if you're thinking of grabbing ASCII Portal. How's that for value? Maybe Valve should take a leaf out of Cymon's books...



SNIPPETS



LESS IS MORE

Supposedly *The Witcher* is too cluttered. If that thought's keeping you up at night, then be to nab *The Witcher: Extreme Immersion Mod* which does away with the HUD, leaving nothing but Geralt. snipurl.com/witchext



FUTURE-PROOFING

ORION, a *Half-Life 2* competitive multiplayer mod should be available as you read this. It'll have class-based combat, an interactive HUD and futuristic environments. One to watch. moddb.com/mods/orion1



HYPHENS GALORE

Parabellum is a free-to-play MMOFPS that's entered closed beta. With nine septillion character options and the Unreal 3 graphics engine, be sure visit its website for a chance to get testing. parabellum.xgl.net

POPCAP SHINES SOME SUN

Plants vs Zombies becomes a free flash game

WEBSITE snipurl.com/plantsz



HURRAH! MORE FREE PopCap games. The publisher isn't content with taking over the world one peg at a time. They've gone and released a free online version of *Plants vs. Zombies* for all your procrastination needs. For those attending *PvZ Anonymous*, it's sure to cause a relapse. For everyone else, it'll cause a dip in the nation's already flagging GDP.

Just like the full game, this online Flash version lets you use a variety of plants to keep the zombie hordes (six types if we're counting) away from your bourgeois house.

There are limits in place – there are only 12 plants as opposed to the 40 in the full game. And while it has three modes – Adventure (14 levels), Endless Survival (perfect for lunch breaks) and Vasebreaker – it's missing the puzzle and mini-game modes from the full title.

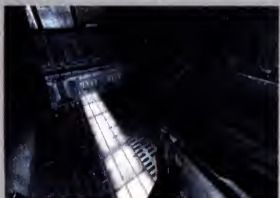
To make up for that, PopCap have included a completely new zombie not found in the PC version. How's that for commitment! It looks like *Plants vs. Zombies*, plays like it should. Do you really need any more reasons to play? You're probably not even reading this anymore, are you?

SNIPPETS



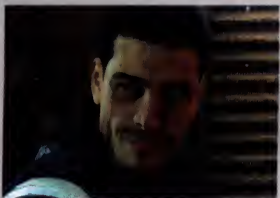
MOUNT STRIDEMORE

If you thought climbing Everest was hard, think again. This *Half-Life 2* mod makes you fight your way to the top of a gigantic mountain and all the way down the other side against Striders. Lots of them.
snipurl.com/strider



HIGH-RES DOOM

Doom 3 was pants, but if you're set on revisiting it, make sure you do it with the upcoming High-Res texture pack courtesy of modder Rygel. It makes a boring game look slightly better.
snipurl.com/doom3highres



HL2 BUFFED

The final release of the *Half-Life 2* prettifying mod, *Cinematic Mod 10* entirely revamps Valve's shooter. New lighting, textures, atmosphere and models finish four years of work.
snipurl.com/factory10

PCZ'S TOP 10 TWITTERERS

Allowing you to see what your mates are up to, Twitter also lets you to be nosy and spy on the lives of famous people in gaming, like this motley lot...

ZOMBIE COW STUDIOS

@thezombiecow

Their game *Time Gentlemen, Please!* is the price of a pint, and the one before that – *Ben There, Dan That!* – was free and following them makes it clear where their sense of humour stems from.



SPLASH DAMAGE

@splashdamage

The Kent-based studio's working on *Brink*, which should be one of the best things ever. Keep tabs on it right here.

IMPULSE

@impulsedriven

Stardock's answer to *Steam* is becoming a legitimate alternative to Valve's online store/social gaming hub. Their Twitter feed is perfect for keeping an eye on cheap offers and new releases.

OBSIDIAN

@Obsidian_Ent

"We make RPGs! Good ones!" their self-penned bio proudly states, skipping over the messing up of *KOTOR 2*. As soon as *Fallout New Vegas* starts kicking off, you'll hear about it here.

ELECTRONIC ARTS

@ea

Yes, EA may be plotting to take over the gaming world by absorbing ever major developer and making them release sequels year-on-year, but their Twittering contains some top competitions, the latest news and amusing finds.

WORLD OF WARCRAFT

@wow_blog

Surprisingly, the self-proclaimed *WOW* addict who runs the account actually has time to update it – completely unofficial, but the closest you'll come to official tweets from Blizzard.

GABE NEWELL

@gabenewell

This is the fellow that heads up Valve – you know: those people behind *Left 4 Dead*. He's a regular Tweeter, and will reply to your messages.

TELLTALE GAMES

@telltalegames

Put simply, David would throw a hissy fit if we didn't mention these point-and-click adventure specialists. So follow them, to avoid David hurting himself further.

TIM SCHAFER

@timoflegend

He's a pioneer. His portfolio boasts *Monkey Island* to *Grim Fandango*. His Twitter contains witty ramblings of the obscure and irrelevant – do you need any more reasons?



SHAWN ELLIOTT

@ShawnElliott

Ex 1-Up superstar and one of those sickeningly popular journo-celebrities, Elliott's now a producer at 2K Boston. He's also a fairly interesting bloke.

CHARLIE BROOKER

@charltonbrooker

Brooker's a humorist, writer, TV personality, and generally a fairly famous chap. To think, he started his shining career by slogging over games at *PC ZONE*. He even replies to tweets!



Don't forget to follow *PC ZONE* (@pczone), and stalk our writers Steve (@misterbrilliant), David (@plughead_zone), Will Porter (@batsphinx), and Jon 'Log' Blyth (@disappointment).

RUNNING OUT OF STEAM

NCsoft to close down their free-to-play MMO

WEBSITE snipurl.com/dunrun



YOU'LL BETTER GET your grinding on as *Dungeon Runners*, the free-to-play *World of Warcraft* clone has officially run out of steam. Come New Year's Day 2010, the servers will shut down whether you like it or not. Stephen Nichols broke the news to fans, stating that the combination of a reduced development team (five down to three) and the lack of profit has led to the MMO's demise.

It's not all bad news because if you've been bucking the trend and actually bought some in-game items or paid membership you'll be

rewarded with a 30 free days of member's benefits, a copy of *City of Heroes* and the extremely enjoyable *Guild Wars: Prophecies*. How's that for support!

On top of that, up until the end of the year the rate of experience has been increased, loot drops boosted and the reduction of in-game costs. Anyone being sneaky and hoping to squat their way past the game's deadline will find themselves charred to a cinder as the developers plan to celebrate New Year's with a literal nuke of the game's world.

Argh, there be
Gingerbeard.



DIRT CHEAP DRAGONS

Turbine relaunch *D&D Online* as a free MMO

WEBSITE ddo.com

BEFORE RPG'S GRACED our screens, we had to indulge our elfish fantasies on paper, dressed up in role-play costumes in our parents' basements. *Dungeons & Dragons* was the pioneer and put fantasy gaming on the map, both on and off-screen.

Dungeons & Dragons Online was once a leader in the MMO world, until *World of Warcraft* started to churn out expansion packs. Subscriber numbers dwindled to the point of extinction prompting Turbine to rethink their billing strategy – news that's brilliant for the thrifty gamer.



Disco inferno.

So *D&DO* has been rebooted as a free-to-play MMO in an effort to bring back past players, and hopefully bring in some new blood. The game's no longer touting the suffix of *Stormreach*, instead opting for the price-point indicating, *Eberron Unlimited*.

To tempt you back, Turbine have raised the level cap to 96, introduced a new class and revolutionised the combat system. There's also a 12-man raid for higher level players and some

new adventure packs. The developers are hoping the fresh content, on top of the already huge world, will appeal to those put off by subscription fees.

There's still the option to pay to get unlimited access every month, but if you can make do without certain items you needn't shell out for anything (there are microtransactions available if you wish).

It's great news for those hit by the news that NCsoft's free MMO *Dungeon Runners* is facing closure.



Too much
plastic surgery.

SNIPPETS



SUPERHERO SAVINGS

At a Sony event, Wes Yanagi supposedly spilled the beans on *DC Universe Online*, confessing that the superhero MMO will have no subscription fees. A rumour that's boosted by the mention of cross-platform servers.
snipurl.com/dcuofree



MY BEAUTIFUL EYES

Korsakovia is a twisted, survival horror *Half-Life 2* mod that's finally been released. When it starts, the paramedics state that they're unable to find the player's eyes, as they think he might have eaten them. Nice.
snipurl.com/korsak

Bug Fix of the Month



THIS MONTH NEED FOR SPEED: SHIFT

"Providing menu navigation through the game using your PC mouse"

MOVIE OF THE MONTH

APB

After months of drooling over screenshots, we finally have some gameplay footage of the cops and robbers MMO *APB*. So what do we now know we didn't before? Well, bloody nothing apart from they'll be police and criminals racing around a city, shooting at each other. Sounds perfect to us.



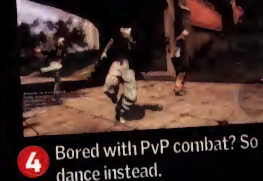
1 *APB* promises players an unrivalled climbing experience.



2 Make friends online by shooting them in the back.



3 Play the noble roll and legally drive over pedestrians.



4 Bored with PvP combat? So dance instead.

Demos



Take a tour of the DVD with *Adam Glick*

TROPICO 3

El Presidente, with these bananas you spoil us

WEBSITE www.tropico3.com/en

THE REVOLUTION IS almost at hand, and so Kalypso Media have released a taster of *Tropico 3*.

This demo takes you through the game's tutorial and the first two missions. First, after ascending to the position of beloved revolutionary leader/dictator you must wheel and deal with gringo-run corporations who desire your island's bananas, to secure your country's financial future (and to fill up your Swiss bank account).

The second mission sees you set adrift after being ousted from power. Landing on an iron-rich island, you must lead your followers to greatness, while not forgetting to set aside some cash for yourself as well.

An update of the original game with added extras like secret police and a president who can walk amongst his people, *Tropico 3* is a whole load of fun for the strategy inclined. Read the review on page 78, then play the demo to see just how good this remake is.



The plane probably has an escaping dictator on board.



Casinos and fat Americans. It must be a tropical paradise.



PROBLEM ZONE

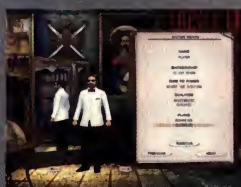
Trouble with your DVD? Help is at hand!

1. If the menu doesn't appear when the disc spins up, open the Run command from the Start menu and enter D:\pcz.exe (D is the DVD drive's letter).
2. If you have a problem with a specific demo or application, check the DVD's Help section. Also ensure your PC's drivers and DirectX version are up-to-date.
3. If that doesn't work check our forums at pczone.co.uk for fixes, or send an email to us at letters@pczone.com. Please describe the problem, what you were doing when it occurred, any error messages that came up, and your system's details.
4. If the DVD itself is faulty, send it and an SAE to Disc Department, Reader Support, Future Publishing Ltd, Bath, BA1 2BW, to get a new one.

We can only provide assistance with technical problems directly related to our cover DVD. The PCZONE discs have been tested and certified virus free by an independent organisation. We recommend that you always run an up-to-date virus checker on any software before running it. Future Publishing Ltd cannot accept any responsibility for corruption, damage and/or loss to your data or your computer system that may occur while using these discs, the programs or the data on them. Ensure that you have backups of data contained on your hard drives before running any new software.

THE PRESIDENT

Here is Lencho Isandro Estanislao Hernandez: a likeable guy who got elected through bribery, and sleeping with many women. His people will flock to support him.



THE PEOPLE

It seems that the people need convincing that the President has their best interests at heart. So he rushes to convince his comrades he isn't utterly corrupt. Just slightly.



THE PRESIDENT AND HIS PEOPLE

THE SPEECH

The people of Tropico show their love for their President as he makes his election speech. Waving fists is a sign of the people's affection for their glorious leader.



THE PROTEST

Mr President, your very presence convinced the people of their error, and the protestors dispersed. They definitely did not leave because they can't stand the sight of you.



RUNES OF MAGIC: THE ELVEN PROPHECY

Like *World of Warcraft*, but free

WEBSITE www.runesofmagic.com/en

FREE-TO-PLAY GAMES ARE

growing in popularity. They let you play an MMO and only spend money if you want to. This great concept is only ruined by the vast majority of FTP MMOs being complete crud.



They're off to do some gardening.

Runes of Magic is different, because it's really good fun. While it plays a lot like *World of Warcraft*, even down to its classes, *Runes* adds a dual-class system, *Oblivion*-style skill progression, and a levelling system that doesn't require finding trainers every time you ding, to Blizzard's formula.

Those who love *WOW* and its ilk, will enjoy running around in *Runes of Magic*'s world. Now you can try it for yourself, as the client for the full game is on the disc.

CLASS TIME



DRUID

These Elven priests draw on nature to power their magic, which can heal or harm.



WARDEN

These Elven warriors protect plants. In return nature spirits aid them in combat.

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 2010

Return of the soccer spreadsheet

WEBSITE www.championshipmanager.co.uk

DODGY MEAT PIES are being scoffed, over-priced team scarves and shirts are being waved, and fights are breaking out in pubs across the land. Yes, the football season is here again. But you won't see any of that in *Championship Manager 2010*.

This year's *Champ Man* includes brand-new features: a 3D match engine; a set-piece creator; world-wide Scouting Networks; and monthly database updates.

This is a football game for the serious fan and armchair manager.



1. WOT, NO BLOBS?

The new match engine shows what's going on the pitch in 3D.

2. PERFORMING SCORE

The Overview shows how your team is doing during a match.

3. LATEST WORD

This news feed gives updates on the latest event on the pitch.

EXTRA EXTRA



SCOUTING NETWORKS

Improving your scouting skills to find new players is possibly the best long-term investment you can make in *Champ Man 2010*.



SET-PIECE CREATOR

Very few know how much planning is required to make a truly great free kick or throw-in.

BEST OF THE REST



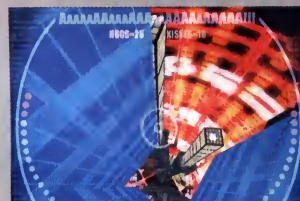
Here are the some of the other demos and movies that you can enjoy on this month's cover DVD. Or not, if that's your will...



MAJESTY 2

majesty2.com

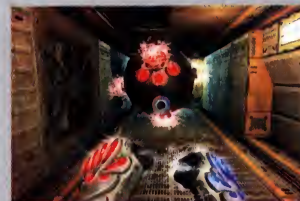
Instead of ordering heroes in this fantasy RTS, you bribe them. Add some city-building, and you get a fine game.



AaaaaAAaaaAAA
aaAAAAaaAAAA!!!

www.dejobaan.com/aaaaa

Proof that leaping of skyscrapers can be a fun experience, instead of deadly.



TWIN SECTOR

www.headupgames.com

You have 10 hours to save humanity using telekinesis and physics puzzles, while obeying a talking computer. It's *Portal*, but with less humour.



WORLD OF ZOO

worldofzoo.com

World of Zoo gives you control of a zoo, while its Animal Creator gives you the chance to 'customise' animals. David Attenborough wouldn't approve of that.

**HOT
DOWNLOADS**
PCZONE

GEARGRINDER

www.headupgames.com

In this action racer you use rockets, mines and bombs against rivals or just blast ahead using jet engines. And you're racing trucks. Jet engine-powered trucks. We love this game without having to play it!



SUPREME RULER 2020 GOLD

www.paradoxplaza.com/supremeruler2020

Pick one of 220 nations to control and then take over the world, in any way you see fit. This RTS-sandbox game will challenge even the most hardcore of hardcore strategy fans.



Freeware

Marco Fiori rummages around for gratis games



PCZONE

ON THE DVD

This month we productively vomit our way to victory, wet our pants in some dark caves, let loose a paper moose in space, get frustrated by an incomplete game and round things off by becoming a dick-selling frying pan that travels to a Communist-inhabited moon.

GLICK'S PICK



PAUL MOOSE IN SPACE WORLD

DEVELOPER thecatamites
WEBSITE snipurl.com/paulmoose

MEET PAUL. A moose in space with a load of overly smiley electronic companions. That is until you meet Sad Door (that's actually a name given by the game) – a depressed gateway who needs you to shine some light on him. Sounds like your everyday case of the blues.

What's particularly magical about *Paul Moose In Space World* is the fact it's been made entirely out of paper. We're not talking the digital kind, but real life, tree-chopped paper. The crayon-coloured backgrounds are paper, the creatures are paper and even the menus are paper. It's all been carefully drawn in real life, then lovingly translated to code for your gaming pleasure.

Paul Moose shows the extent some people go to getting their game noticed. Do the developer a favour by playing it, after all it's not even that long. The quirky choice of art is complimented by a soundtrack that brings about nostalgic memories of *Button Moon* and *The Clangers*.

There may be better (and longer) indie adventure games, but none of them are as quaint as this one. Also, you don't have to worry about getting a paper cut.

PRESS ACTION TO INSPECT DICKS

A Health & Safety nightmare.



78641: A TARG ADVENTURE

Got myself a cursing, gambling, racist frying pan...

DEVELOPER GZStorm WEBSITE snipurl.com/78641game

78641 IS A ridiculous caper through the unreservedly insane. It doesn't hold back as it throws every kind of drug-fuelled fantasy at you. The lead is a foul-mouthed frying pan who commits a hit-and-run and gets robbed by the shady 'Toothpaste Man'. Throw in a visit to the moon by a Rock-It ship (fashioned in the shape of an electric guitar), only to find it crawling with Saddam Hussein look-alikes who are spouting Eastern European gibberish.



78641 seems to share a lot in common with *Time Gentlemen, Please!* Not least of which is an unholy and unnatural obsession with cock jokes; for instance, you wander into Dickorama only to walk out a salesman of half-price dildos. It's completely mental and seemingly goes out of its way to disturb you. Just take its dialogue: "Time to massage the prostate," is something that's as disturbing in its context as it is out. No one is safe, from floating heads to Ukrainian stereotyping.

But enough about Targ's warped imagination. As a freeware game, it's unexpectedly fleshed out. Sticking firmly to adventure conventions, (walk about, pick up things, talk to people), it all seems uninspired; that is until you die.

Whether it's laziness by the developers or an actual design choice, there's no save feature available, so

78641 plays out like *The Truman Show*, just instead of having Jim Carrey star, you have a piece of kitchenware who gives Gordon Ramsay a run for his swear jar money.

The dialogue-trees, item-uses and twisted environments all stay the same. The only difference is that you've lost your inventory and you're plopped back at the beginning. This means you're free to try the game differently to avoid making the same mistakes twice, like getting punished for trusting adventure gaming clichés (don't rummage around in the trash, there are dangerous syringes lying in wait).

All this madness is wrapped up in blocky graphics with a low-bit soundtrack. It's perfect for what *78641* is trying to achieve: nothing. It's utterly pointless and that's why you need to play it.

SOLAR PLEXUS

A perplexing experience lacking sun

DEVELOPER Konjak [WEBSITE snipurl.com/solarplexus](http://snipurl.com/solarplexus)

THE DEVELOPER OF *Solar Plexus* openly admits getting bored of frustrating himself (and us) with his level design and has bugged off to work on something else. What's left are nine well-designed levels that manage to merge platforming with puzzle solving.

Those searching for some adrenaline will find themselves satisfied

by *Solar Plexus*' heroine. Clad in anime-inspired armour you'll career around the world like a kangaroo on crack, latching onto gravity-ignoring tethers and blowing stuff up. The trigger happy should be warned, that they'll find themselves short of ammo, which stops them from finishing the level.

There are some clever gameplay concepts going on in *Solar Plexus*. The



Dali's latest work of art.

ability to move blocks mean that not only do you have to carefully time your jumps, but you have to think about the route you'll take. Konjak doesn't keep things simple. There are blocks that act like controllable tractor beams allowing you to control how close or far you get to them, which as a result let you get to otherwise unreachable spots.

This is platforming for the logical gamer. Despite the pumping techno-rock beats, you're in no hurry (minus finishing with an embarrassing time), so those gamers who like to think before

they leap will benefit from a less frustrating experience. It definitely beats its overly enthusiastic rivals who rely solely on high-octane reflexes.

Just as you get the hang of *Solar Plexus*, it ends. The only real positive we can draw from Konjak's abandonment is that he's gone on to build better things and considering the quality apparent in his discarded project, this can only be a good thing.

Still, unfinished or not, *Solar Plexus* will provide you with a fresh platforming experience.



Someone call an electrician.



Goal!

BEACON

When potholing met steroids...

DEVELOPER Chevy Ray Johnston [WEBSITE snipurl.com/beacongame](http://snipurl.com/beacongame)

THE SOUND OF water softly dripping into a lake, the beady eyes of bats, and the darkness threatening to swallow you whole. *Beacon* seems to be a cutesy version of *The Descent*.

Cartoon graphics can't hide the fact that the protagonist – an unnamed orange-faced man, who looks like he's spent too long on the sunbed and could do with staying underground for a while – is trapped in near-pitch black caves. It's a disconcerting setting than makes you feel claustrophobic, helpless against the constricting darkness.

To escape the shadows (and whatever beasties lurk within), you're led along the winding levels by a helpful beacon of light. Unsure as to what its purpose is, you have no choice but to cling to its life-preserving shine.

If you dally, you'll be lost forever. *Beacon*'s only other sources of light are

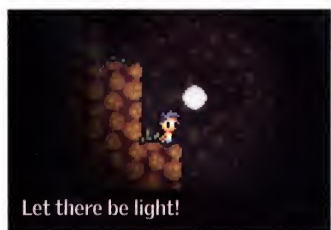
the crystals that litter the levels. Their glow waxes and wanes so it's important to be hasty in your traversing of the caves. It's obvious you're not alone; the eyes of creatures piercing the gloom. Just as you approach them, they vanish leaving you unaware as to whether they'll return.

As you climb, swim and jump your way through the caves, you begin to feel a bond develop between you and your beacon. You'll feel safe in its

warmth but worry when it vanishes up another path, leaving you to probe the darkness tentatively. It's astonishing that a tiny indie game, so minimalist in design, can make you feel this way.

On top of that, it's a testament to *Beacon*'s developer when you consider that the game was developed in only 48 hours.

Beacon doesn't take very long to complete and has a wonderful twist at the end, so get playing.

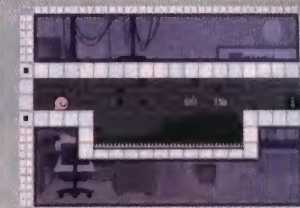


Let there be light!



Oh Beacon, where for art thou!

WEBGAME OF THE MONTH



SPEWER

DEVELOPER Edmund [WEBSITE snipurl.com/spewergame](http://snipurl.com/spewergame)

SPEWER FOCUSES ON a cheeky grey blob who's got a volatile mouth. To navigate the levels, you'll need to propel yourself about by the power of your gob. Hazard-filled gaps are traversed by vomiting while unreachable platforms are no match for your jump-enhanced spewing. If your stomach starts running on empty, you just open wide and gobble up any gunk floating around.

This leads to some ingenious level design that has you carefully conserving your precious sick – something that's made more difficult thanks to the cleverly coded physics system. Heave too much and it'll fly everywhere, leaving you stuck. Still, it's refreshing to see someone encouraging you to play with your (half-digested) food.

Extend



Marco Fiori sorts through mods so you don't have to



SITUATION OUTBREAK

Suffering from a severe case of déjà vu...

MOD FOR Half-Life 2 [WEBSITE zombiemodsource.info](http://www.zombiemodsource.info)

CROUCHED IN A dank corner, back against the wall, cowering in fear as a bunch of rotting men advance on me – I'm sure I've been in this situation before. This isn't *Left 4 Dead*, but the latest zombie mod for *Half-Life 2*: the rebranded *SituationMod: Source*.

See, if *Situation Outbreak* was a company it'd be in court, profusely defending itself concerning the breaking of patents. However, as this is the videogames industry, imitation by flattery is actually considered a positive. You see, the mod has managed to harvest as many gameplay elements from other undead games as possible. Think of it as a literalising of the zombie metaphor – it's eaten the brains of its rivals and rebirthed their concepts.

Zombie Panic, the *Counter Strike: Source* *Zombie Mod*, *Call of Duty: World at War*'s Nazi Zombies and Valve's own *Left 4 Dead*; the list goes on and on. The Charger, the mod's answer to *L4D*'s Hunter, leaps around the level clawing at your soft face. The ability to create barricades undeniably reminds us of *WAW*'s undead success and you can buy a variety of weapons à la *CS*. There's even the same sense of *Zombie*



Panic dread as the mindless horde slowly surround you, leaving you helpless and well, dead.

You could argue that the integration of so many ideas provides a watered down, confused experience, and you'd be right. For everything that *Situation Outbreak* does right, there's a misguided design choice. The ability to make blockades is a lovely touch, but the overpowered weapons and sluggish nature of the zombies mean your hidey-hole becomes an impenetrable fortress. If you're the last one left alone, you'll unavoidably find yourself dead, but add another human into the mix and it's far too simple to camp out with a stockpile of ammo until the round is over.

A good chunk of the levels are geared towards the above approach

and as a result, quickly bore even the most seasoned of campers. Thankfully there's a lot to choose from (and the option to create your own), so if you're in control of the server, it's easy to switch to a more open setting.

Where *Situation Outbreak* really shines is with friends. The ability to play as the undead allows for unexpected tactics. With humans controlling the enemy, it becomes far more difficult to survive the round. Teamwork is rewarded with points, which in turn allow you to level up and can be spent on more powerful weapons. The servers track your progress so if you find a good one, you can rejoin at the same level.

Still, *Situation Outbreak* is the perfect time waster for those too cheap to invest in *L4D*.

STARGATE: SAN ANDREAS REBELLION

Sandboxing with space craft

MOD FOR Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas **WEBSITE** moddb.com/mods/stargate-san-andreas-rebellion

UNHOLY OBSESSION WITH killing prostitutes, jacking cars and punching tramps in the face? Own every single piece of *Stargate* merchandise that's seen the light of day? If you answer "yes" to those questions, then this is the mod for you.

The awkwardly titled, *Stargate: San Andreas Rebellion*, this *Grand Theft Auto* total conversion takes the long-running sci-fi show and ports it over to

Rockstar's prized possession. Version one is packed full with *Stargate* loveliness with locations, vehicles and weapons ripped straight from the series. There's a useable *Stargate*, unique animations, hidden extras and flyable ships (thanks to the inclusion of planes in *San Andreas*). Their modelling could do with some work, but that's something that's hindered by the aging *San Andreas* engine.

Eat your heart out
Star Wars.



Even with its current rough edges, *Stargate* shows there's still life in the *GTA: San Andreas* modding scene. It's made even more prevalent by the reluctance of many not wishing to make the transition over to *GTA4* just yet.

The developer seems to be committed, so if this mod tickles your fancy, be sure to keep your eyes peeled for version 2.

THE WITCHER: BLACK EDITION

Just when you thought things couldn't get grimmer

MOD FOR The Witcher **WEBSITE** moddb.com/mods/witcherblackedition

THIS MONTH'S MOD for *The Witcher* is a gothic redux of the game's characters and interface. Not satisfied by the game's already dark edge, Roxtar has sucked out any remaining colour. The UI and the game's menu screens have been overhauled. In fact, the entire presentation has been tweaked in the effort to make the game more badass.

This means Geralt's belongings have also been given the darkening treatment. They've been bumped up to high-definition (we're unsure what that means, but we're sure it includes pixels), and

been based on their real-life counterparts, which supposedly makes them look slightly more metallic. You can be the judge of that.

There are loads of other miscellaneous tweaks that range from the altering of Geralt's scar to changing female red-heads to brunettes.

There's not much we can fault with *The Witcher*, especially since the excellent *Enhanced Edition* was released, but if you think this Eastern European low fantasy was just too cheerful for you, or you if you just can't stand gingers, be sure to give *Black Edition* a look.



LEFT 4 TELETUBBIES

A psychoanalyst's wet dream...

MOD FOR Left 4 Dead **WEBSITE** snipurl.com/teletub

THE APOCALYPSE IS here. You're dashing through apartment blocks in blind fear. Then you hear it: "DIPSYS!" The brightly coloured fiends come rushing round the corners clawing at you with their oversized hands. Their

affection for the young is no longer present; all they seem to be concerned with is gnawing you to death. It's all over before you can scream "Po!"

Left 4 Teletubbies illustrates how malevolent children's TV can be. Those

beady eyes, that incessant chirping – they seem like the child's toy for Satan's offspring. Unintentionally demonic, they seem to suit the atmosphere of *L4D* perfectly. As they charge at you, flailing their arms, what begins as Benny Hill-esque joviality quickly turns sour. As ever, you're fighting for your survival as the AI director throws wave after wave of the beasts at you.

Luckily, you're equipped as you'd be in any *L4D* campaign and it's oddly satisfying mowing them down. It's a shame the special infected haven't changed, we would have loved to have heard the Tank music, only to be chased down by the gigantic Hoover called Noo Noo. That's an experience we can only dream about.



MOD CONS!

The add-ons to avoid

Half-Life 2: All sounds replaced by My voice!

HALF-LIFE 2: ALL SOUNDS REPLACED BY MY VOICE

MOD FOR Half-Life 2

WEBSITE bigtrase.blogspot.com

While hilarious, this mod is the most pointless one out there, and it shows that its creator Trase has far too much time on his hands. This mod replaces every sound effect in *HL2* with a poor beatboxed version done by Trase. Highly annoying and yet amusing at the same time.

Online Zone

What's new in *PC ZONE*'s forum and Fight Club

COME AND
TAKE ON THE
ZONE STAFF IN
OUR MONTHLY
ONLINE GAMING
FREE-FOR-ALL!

Welcome to a run down of what the PC ZONE team did online this month. We did everything – went on the forum, tweeted on a semi-regular basis, had a big old scrap with our readers where we once again proved our superiority on the gaming field (well, superiority at losing that is). So if you want *The Guild*, dodgy Microsoft adverts, and ways to combat gaming ennui we've got it here. We forget nothing. Zone Chat? Ah, well...

FIGHT CLUB

A Crash Course in being really shit



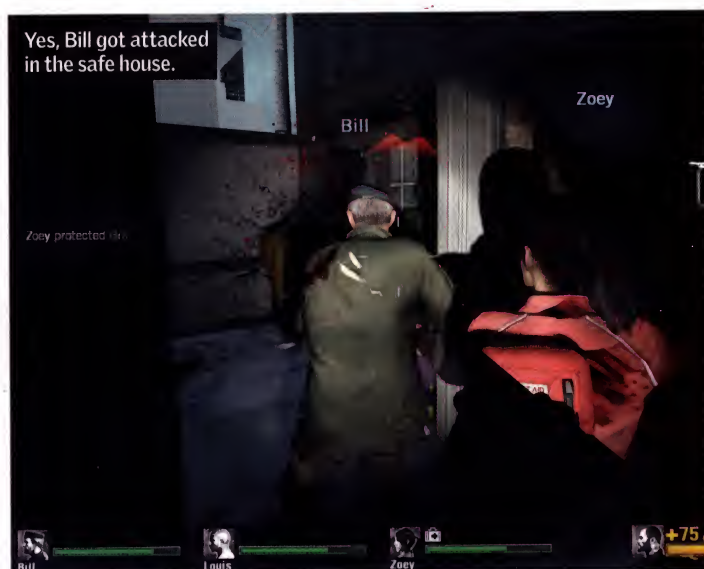
STEPHEN GATELY IS dead. This is the first thing we've written since Stephen Gately died. I say "we" because this article is being written collectively by the *PC ZONE* team, bound by our grief and by a piece of extension lead, each of us taking turns to press a key before letting slip an anguished wail. Which is difficult when there are tears streaming down our faces, out of our eyes and on to one another's heads.

When *Fight Club* took place, however, Stephen Gately wasn't dead. Or if he was, nobody knew about it. It was a world in which Stephen Gately was very much alive, and it pains us to have to write about that happier time. You might as well ask a man with a broken arm about all of the best things he's ever thrown. Or a man with a punched-in face about his hitherto successful modelling career. Hopefully that goes some way towards explaining why, fully 160 words into this bit we haven't mentioned what happened at *Fight Club*, or what game was played.

We'll do that now.

Fight Club this month took place in *Left 4 Dead*'s most recently added campaign, *Crash Course* – easily the funniest campaign yet, with its helicopter-based conversation pieces never failing to bring a chuckle to our faces. Forum stars bignobody,

Yes, Bill got attacked in the safe house.



"If the game could've awarded us minus points, it would have done"

seregrail7 and MashPotato led a successful versus mode charge against our own [PCZ] misterbrilliant, aided by the mucky archy_bold and by the walking cabbage-man that is captain. binky. Like all good teams, we engaged in a pre-game melee-each-other-in-the-groin ritual, before leaving the safe room and promptly being mauled by the expertly utilised abilities of our four skilled opponents.

We were tragic, in one round scoring zero points. If the game could've awarded us minus points for fleeing back into the safe room, it would have done. We don't know if the AI Director has the capacity to laugh, but somewhere on our CPUs a series of binary

switches clacked on and off in a way that could be interpreted as a mocking shriek. As the Infected we fared better, preventing the humans from reaching their goal. They did, however, amass some points. A couple of hundred of them, compared to our paltry 70-something.

Of course, we blame *Crash Course*. There's one bit where, if you're a Boomer, your arse sticks right out from behind some crates. You can tell the other team have seen you because they edge closer and closer. Their silhouettes stutter steadily towards the angle at which they can pop you, but you can't vomit on them, a stunning indictment of your obesity.

More in November, when we'll be *TF2*ing it to the high heavens. Keep an eye on our pages on *Steam* and on Facebook (facebook.com/pczonemag) for times n' dates.

tw@tter

Tweeting like a bird



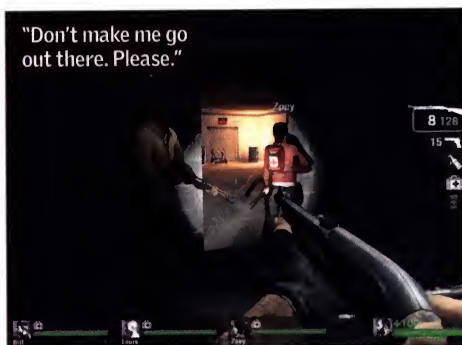
THIS MONTH SAW another mixed bag from *PC ZONE*'s contribution to the social communication revolution/modern-day irritation that is Twitter. Coming late to the party, we threw out the blooper reel from the excellent *The Guild* – the web series about MMO addicts (watchtheguild.com). Proving how good *The Guild* is, the outtakes weren't as funny as the actual show. And that's the actual guild up there!

Then there were the vomit-inducing creations of Microsoft's marketing department. Seriously who the hell is going to hold a *Windows 7 Launch Party*? Especially when it consists of four bored out-of-work actors and a crappy laptop, surrounded by the remnants of a prepubescent's birthday celebration. But the dreadfulness of that advert paled to the fake Bruce Springsteen *Vista Service Pack 1* video. That nearly drove the team to rip our eyeballs out and chew our ears off.

But the tweet we loved was the news about a game that could bring Brooker back to us – *18 Wheels of Steel: Extreme Trucker!* But do we really need more dead hooker in cab gags? Of course we do.

If you're a twitterer, subscribe to us: @pczone.

"Don't make me go out there. Please."



NOTES FROM THE FORUM

Is there are cure for gaming malaise?

CAFF: I think I've become far too jaded for gaming. I bought *Batman* over the weekend, and I don't feel like starting it. How do I cure this jadedness?

KING_CLUELESS: Maybe you've got too much time to play games! I crave gaming action because I don't get enough quality time with the PC. Failing that, install your favourite title and get stuck into it. Returning to *Deus Ex* reminds me what it's about every time.

THE TALKING HEAD: I was real jaded about games for months after *Spore* came out. Come to think about it, I can't think of a game that I have been excited about since *Spore*.

THE TINGLER: Maybe the games you've tried playing just aren't exciting you? It sounds like you bought *Batman: Arkham Asylum* based on all you've heard, not because you were really looking forward to it.

LIQUID_METAL: As you're a jaded old man just play *Batman* for Mark Hamill's Joker. It's a thing of beauty.

SUNSCRAMBLE: I'm with you on the jaded front. I've still got a large stack of Grade-A titles sitting in The Pile waiting to be played, but even if I install them they rarely keep me entertained for more than an hour.

ALBERTHAMMOND: My pile includes *Crysis*, *GTA4* and others. I installed *Call of Juarez* last week and that kept me busy for a while, but now I'm back on *Civ 4* again even though I'm shit at it. Jaded doesn't scratch the surface!

DR_DARK: I often go through "phases" of being really into a lot of different stuff. Just try getting into a new thing. Emulation, indie games, scouring eBay for long-lost classics and trying to get them to work. All these have provided ample distractions over the years.

KING_CLUELESS: That's good advice Dr_Dark. I'd also think about finding an online game that hooks you. *Team Fortress 2* or *Left 4 Dead* with friends is always a fun experience for me. Must admit though we could do with some titles that fire the imagination more.



CAN'T MAKE FIGHT CLUB?

If you find yourself unable to make it to Fight Club – perhaps you've been sealed in a tomb by a nefarious Nazi villain with a crooked smile – then feel free to join other PCZ readers on the following public servers.

WHO'S WHO

Steve Hogarty [PCZ]misterbrilliant
David Brown [PCZ]plughead
Phil Wand [PCZ]peoplesfrontofjudea
Jon Blyth [PCZ]log
Will Porter [PCZ]batsphinx
Nick Brakespear [PCZ]flatline
Chris Capel [PCZ]thetinger

BATTLEFIELD 2

85.236.100.48:16567

CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE

85.236.100.48:28960

COUNTER-STRIKE: SOURCE

85.236.100.48:27015

DAY OF DEFEAT: SOURCE

85.236.100.48:27315

HALF-LIFE 2: DEATHMATCH

85.236.100.48:27215

TEAM FORTRESS 2

85.236.100.48:27115

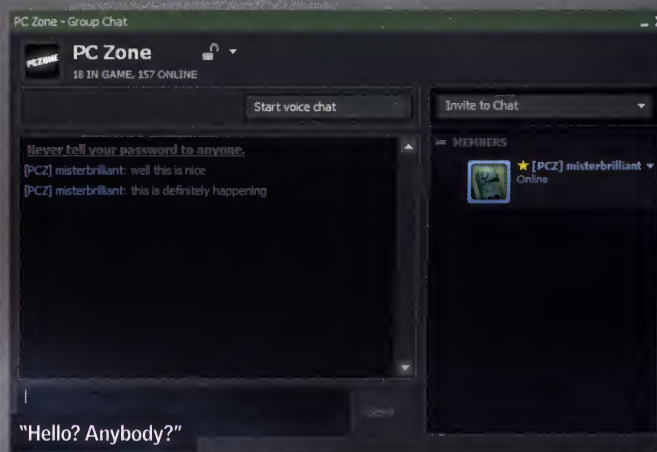
SERVERS PROVIDED BY...



MULTIPLAY

ZONE CHAT

God, fairies, Zone Chat...



WOW, WHAT A wild ride this Zone Chat was. If you missed it, you missed the online event of the century. A chatstravaganza. It was not a chatastrophe, despite what some of our detractors claim between denying the Holocaust and stamping on orphan children. It did happen of that there's no doubt. If you accept that, here's a bulleted list of evidence:

- We have witnesses. Just ask one of the many people who were there: AntonDuBeke1988, [breast] Reduction, DR.intelliphone, Rawlings, CroydonMassif, thehomelylass, SolidCork&RubberCenter, Synthetic, leather[cover], officialOLB3league, and baseballONmyDESK.
- Call up Valve and ask to see access records for *Steam* on the date of Zone Chat. Ask them for a printed list of activities for that day to be posted to your house and you'll see that we were in the chat room, chatting with our readers, and that we weren't, for instance, playing *Borderlands* all evening.

● It's statistically impossible for us to have missed Zone Chat, as there's been one every month for four years now. That's just maths, stupid. You know maths, don't you?

So that's the issue put to bed. We'll continue not missing Zone Chats as per usual, as long as you continue not failing to show up to them. Check our Steam and Facebook pages for details.

HOW TO JOIN IN!

To be a part of next month's ZONE Chat, join our Steam Community group: **PC ZONE (PCZ)**. If you don't have Steam, first be ashamed of yourself, and then download it from steampowered.com. Keep an eye out for announcements in that there Steam group for the date of the next chat event...

HOW TO Make a game

PART 3 Backsteet's back, and so is Steve Hogarty's *Hat Game*

SO I MISSED a month. Maybe two, I can't quite remember. I really am very sorry, I can't abide an appearance of laziness, so I've armed myself with some very robust excuses. My PC died, that's the big one. It popped when I plugged in some headphones and shorted the motherboard, and I was without access to *Hat Game* for weeks and weeks. This problem wouldn't have occurred in Victorian times.

However, I have busied myself in the meantime, returning to the drawing board on several aspects of *Hat Game*. My geese for example, fun as they may be, have no bearing on the player or his hat. "What," I would sit and ask myself, "will these bloody geese do? How will they interact with the player? Should they steal the hat? Where will they



"My PC's working again. And *Hat Game* is back on the rails"

take it? What will be the penalty for having a goose steal your hat? Bird-saliva build-up along the rim?"

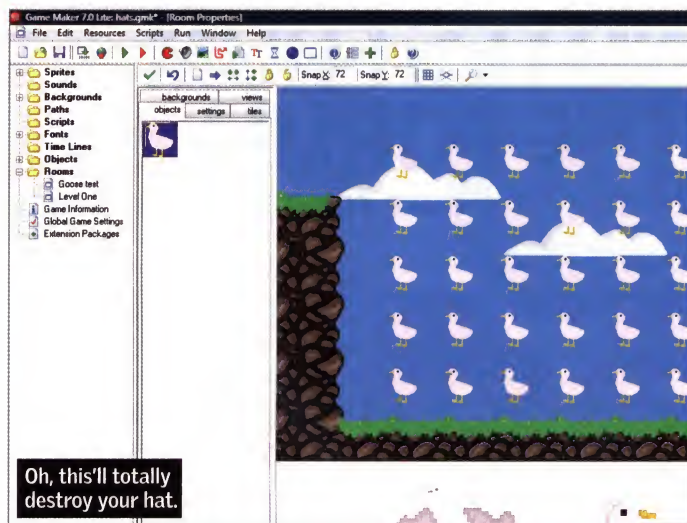
I needed help, so I turned to Dan Marshall of Zombie Cow Studios, creator of *Gibbage* and *Time Gentlemen, Please!*, beer-guzzling friend and all-round helpful man. It was, in effect, a game design meeting. There were notes. There was Alpine Lager. And there was guidance. He suggested that, instead of the geese stealing the hat (though that's not being ruled out) they should rush over and group around the hat once it touches the ground.

FOUL FOWL

They would then peck at and damage the hat, at which point the player must kick the frenzied birds away.



The hat would go through various stages of disrepair. First, some fraying around the edges. Then, springs and stuff would pop out, before



DO IT YOURSELF Do it like Steve

WWW.YOYOGAMES.COM/ GAMEMAKER

If you can't be arsed learning to code an engine, the simple but tremendously powerful development platform *GameMaker* does most of the hard stuff for you.

FORUMS.INDIEGAMER.COM

For when you need help, all the coolest indie folk hang out here and exchange ideas and tips and stuff.

TIGSOURCE.COM

Even more indie community stuff going on here, whether you want to be involved or just stare sycophantically at the indie crowd doing their wonderful thing.

GIMP.ORG

Free, open-source image editor. This software is very difficult to use, but if you don't want to drop hundreds of pounds on *Photoshop*, it's all you got. Well, this and *MS Paint*.

the hat begins to smoke. Once the head wear has sustained enough pecks, it would immolate – a fiery hat is only a few pecks away from utter destruction, and points will be awarded for arriving at the end of the level with as pristine a hat as possible.

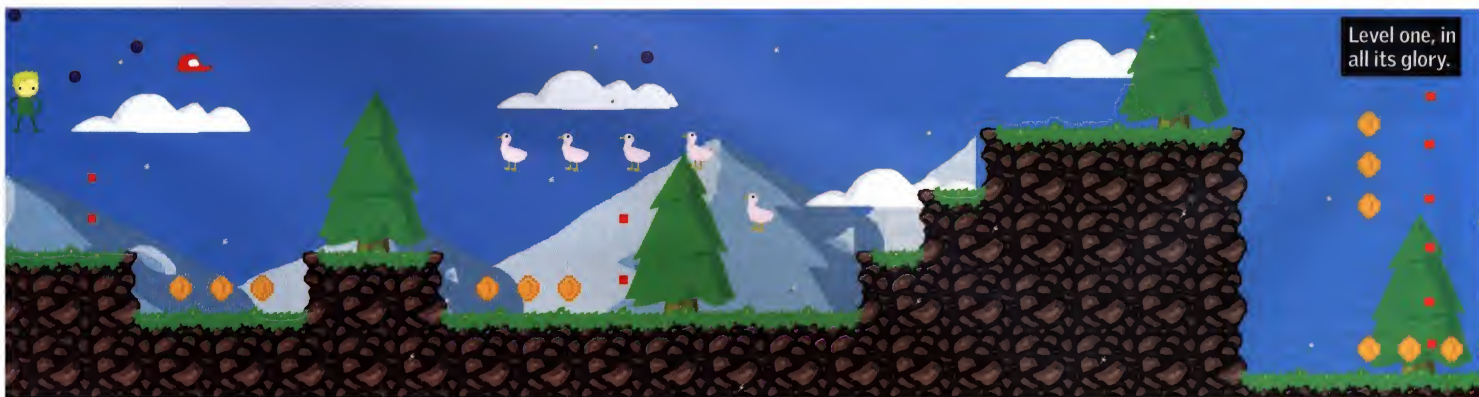
And with that, *Hat Game* has a point. It has a goal, and a way of directly appraising the player's actions. Scenarios sprawl out of my brain like an unfurling rug. Pits thick with geese, which would instantly destroy your hat were it to touch the heaving mass of feathers and whatever beaks are made out of. Flying

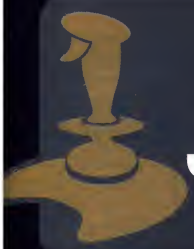
geese who'll catch your hat and drop it off at the nearest gaggle.

My PC's working again. And *Hat Game* is back on the rails. With this newfound sense of direction, my non-exploding hardware and the tutelage of expert indie developers, I think this could be something big. I might even have a playable version on the DVD next month. **PEZ**

NEXT MONTH

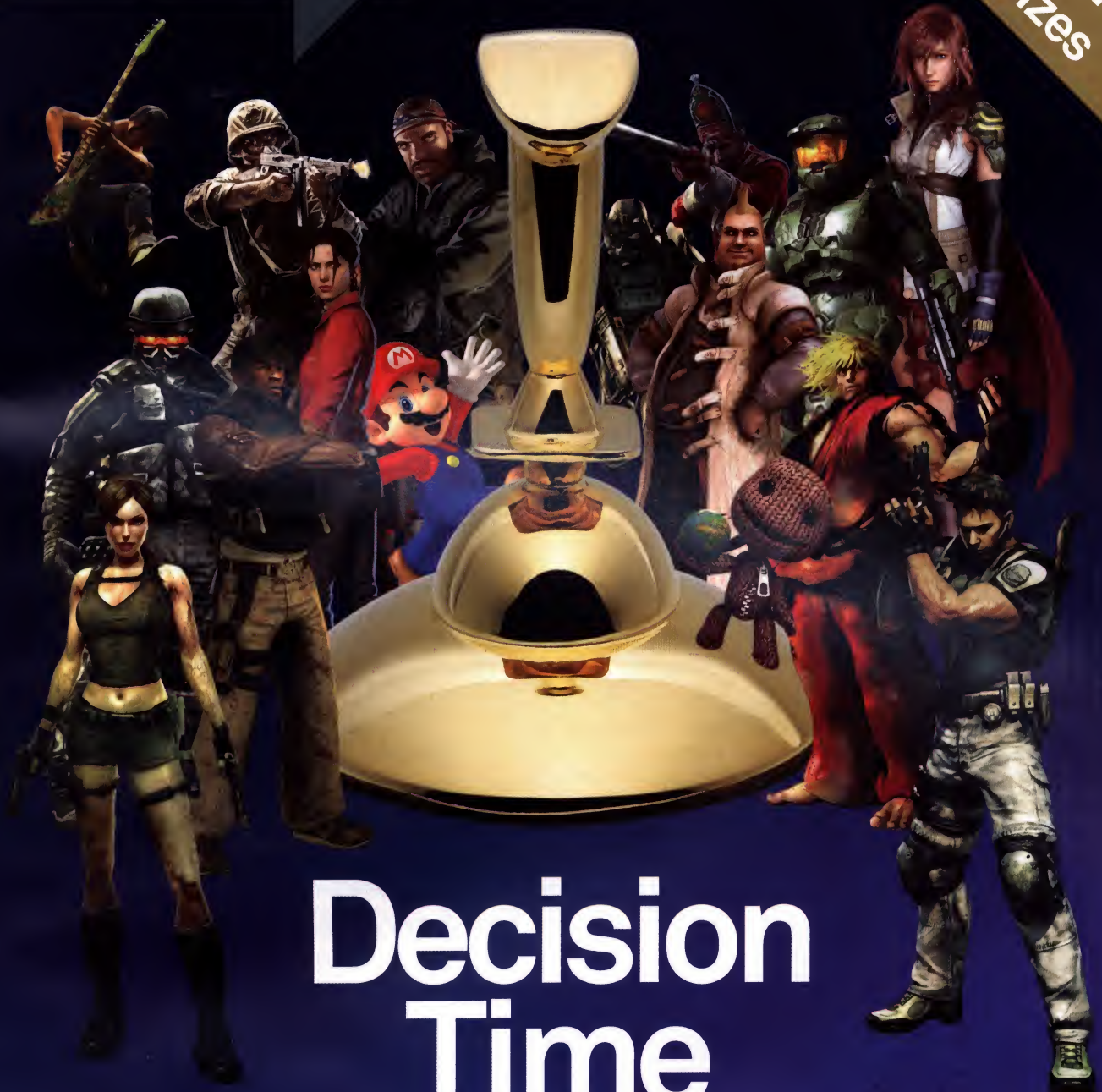
The geese wrap their laughing gear around my headgear.





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Retrozone

Facing the wrong way since 1995...



Flashback

CARRIER COMMAND

YOU CAN TELL just how much love there is for this Atari ST classic simply by looking at the response to the revelation that Bohemia (of *ArmA* and *Operation Flashpoint* fame) are making a sequel. The consensus is that, while fans are ecstatic about the remake, Bohemia shouldn't change a thing.

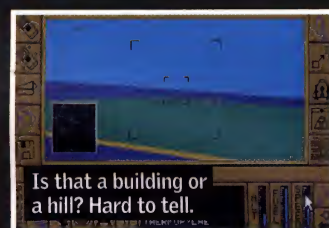
Not a single ounce of code should be altered, the vehicles shouldn't handle

any differently, the islands should all have the same names, and the only sounds we should hear are the pings and white noise engines of approaching Mantas and Walruses. In fact, just put the ST version on a DVD and sell it to us again – it's the only way Bohemia can avoid crushing our delicate, nostalgia-crippled brains.

Old *Carrier Command* was a simple affair. You commanded a robot aircraft

carrier, and were tasked with capturing an archipelago before an AI foe did the same. You did this by driving your carrier to an island, loading up one of your amphibious vehicles with a DIY base kit and sending it off to set up camp. Your Manta fighters could be launched from your deck to protect your carrier and your islands, and could even, providing there was a runway, land and be refuelled.

It was in proper 3D too, a space-age marvel with multiple camera angles showing your armoured vehicles docking and leaving your carrier. You could control these boats and planes yourself from a first-person view, or, in desperate situations, use the giant



Is that a building or a hill? Hard to tell.

laser turret on your carrier to fend off attacks.

The emulated version on *STEem* crashes after about 25 minutes of in-game time, though. Which is a bit of a pain considering it takes a good 10 minutes to cross the seas between islands. Some fiddling with a blank disk ROM and *Carrier Command*'s save game function might fix it, but that sort of meta-meddling is beyond us. Tricking games into thinking they're running on a real Atari ST and saving to imaginary disk drives makes us feel like we're the robots in the Matrix.

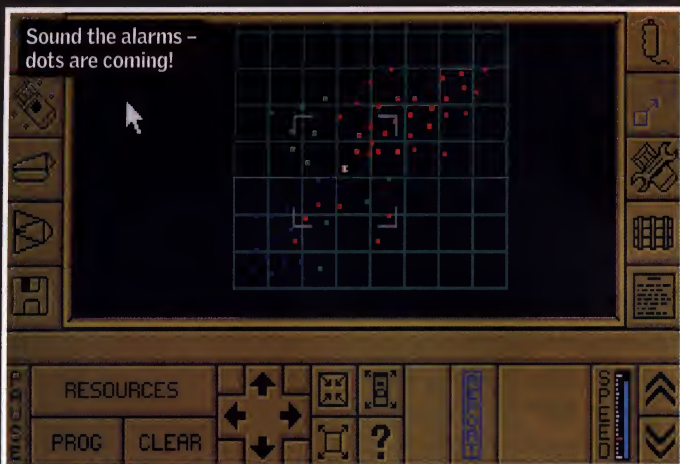
But how? Joining the old navy

You don't get much more emulated than the Atari ST. A machine that used to take up real physical space now exists as a microscopic arrangement of binary switches on hard drives. Take that, past!

So if you'd like to play *Carrier Command*, we'd recommend arranging your bits in such a way that you have the Atari ST emulator *STEem*, as it's the one

we tend to use. *Carrier Command* can be found on the 94th Automation Disk (it's got a viking warrior on the crack screen), which could be found on the internet.

steem.atari.st – Here's where to start looking. But be sure to stop looking right before you find a *Carrier Command* ROM and start breaking the law.



Your First Steps So you've come into command of a carrier, now what?



1 SWOOSHI
The title screen is amazing. If Bohemia replicate one thing precisely it should be this.



2 MENU
Strategy games are slow. Action games put you much closer to the enemy AI carrier.



3 GENESIS
"Creating game world." Please wait." So far no games containing this message have been crap.



4 LIVE LONG
Vulcan Island is the first sight you'll behold in this beautiful world. Ain't she pretty?



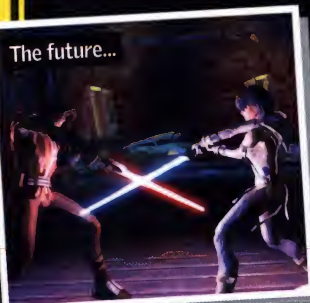
5 MANTA
You've got to outfit your Mantas before they take off, and press a button to bring them to the deck.



6 ZZZZAP
Naturally, you'll want to shoot at the first thing you see. Which is your own base. Oh well.

Now & Then

STAR WARS: THE OLD REPUBLIC vs STAR WARS: DARK FORCES



The future...

TRAVEL BACK TO 1995 and peek through the bedroom window of any *Star Wars* fan and you'll find them playing *Dark Forces*. Then, climb through their window, sneak up behind them, place your hands on your hips and bellow, "You wouldn't believe that 15 years from now there's a *Star Wars* game where you get to run around being a Jedi in a multiplayer persistent online universe." They'll get a shock, but they'll calm down once you assure them that along the way they'll receive a steady and unreliable stream of great *Star Wars* games featuring none other than the hateful anti-hero Kyle Katarn.

Finally, warn this person of Michael Jackson's impending death so that the King of Pop may be saved from being killed in 2009, before quickly climbing back out of the window before the police arrive.



The past...

Play it! Start blasting stormtroopers with lasers, today!

- 1 You can buy *Dark Forces* on Steam. As LucasArts new insistence on re-releasing retro games renders this guide obsolete, here's a baked potato recipe.
- 2 Take one, large potato – a Russet Burbank or King Edward is best due to their size – and gently clean it under warm, running water. Remove any protrusions, like those little roots.
- 3 Pierce the skin of the potato with a fork two or three times to prevent the spud from exploding in the oven, potentially killing millions. Sprinkle salt all over the wet tater.
- 4 Pop the tatty into a preheated oven on gas mark six, and leave it there for one hour and 10 minutes. Remove from oven and immediately place in mouth.

MAMEframe

9 BALL SHOOTOUT!



PRESUMABLY, THE REASON pool games exist is because most people can't fit pool tables in their bedrooms. It's also the reason cooking games exist when we can't be arsed to do more than microwave pots of chips.

Arcades, however, are large enough to fit pool tables into. Furthermore, pool tables are probably cheaper than arcade cabinets. So why aren't they in there? They could probably have boxing rings to replace the fighting games too. And race tracks for all those car games. Must we think of everything?

What proper physical pool can't offer you is the chance to challenge a series of increasingly bizarre characters in a string of matches. Like this lady shown here, who says things like "I'm one brainy blonde!" and "I



want to be loved by Cue," who we imagine to be another Corner Pocket patron, and not some sort of lewd innuendo. You are, by the way, some sort of superhero character. Probably should've mentioned that earlier.



Is that really Poolboy?

Time Charts

WHEN CITIES RULED

THE YEAR IS 1995, it's undeniably February, and sitting atop the charts (the Gallup charts, compiled by racehorses) is none other than *SimCity 2000*, a city-building simulation so forward-thinking that they confidently stuck a date no less than five years hence on the end of the title. What would they do if they wanted to release another *SimCity* game in the meantime? Well, they'd call it *3000* of course. And that's what they did, in 1999. *Sim City 4(000)* followed in 2003. And then *Societies* happened, creating ripples on par with a trout fart.

2000 is perhaps the most fondly remembered *SimCity* title, and it was the first time a Maxis game used the nonsense phrase "Reticulating splines" in a loading screen. A wholesome tradition that would be continued in almost every game that's ever been since. Even though no splines were ever reticulated in this simulator. Will Wright included that bit of gibberish because it sounded cool.

SimCity 2000 also had Godzilla. Which automatically makes it brilliant.

PC ZONE Top 20 February 1995

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1 SIMCITY 2000 MAXIS | 12 GABRIEL KNIGHT SIERRA ONLINE |
| 2 TIE FIGHTER LUCASARTS | 13 PREMIER MANAGER 2 GREMLIN GRAPHICS |
| 3 FRONTIER: ELITE 3 GAMETEK | 14 CANNON FODDER VIRGIN |
| 4 THEME PARK EA | 15 MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR 5 MICROSOFT |
| 5 X-WING LUCASARTS | 16 PLAYBOY DATE BOOK SIERRA ONLINE |
| 6 LEMMINGS 2 PSYGNOSIS | 17 BRIAN LARA'S CRICKET AUDIOGENIC |
| 7 OVERLORD VIRGIN | 18 LEISURE SUIT LARRY SIERRA ONLINE |
| 8 INDYCAR RACING VIRGIN | 19 RYDER CUP GOLF OCEAN |
| 9 TFX OCEAN | 20 ACES OVER EUROPE SIERRA ONLINE |
| 10 DOOM ID SOFTWARE | |
| 11 FIFA INTERNATIONAL SOCCER EA | |

Back In The Day

ELITE

On the 25th anniversary of its launch, a mostly harmless *Steve Hogarty* takes a look back at the seminal space-faring classic...

DEVELOPER David Braben, Ian Bell **PUBLISHER** Firebird
WEBSITE elite.frontier.co.uk **RELEASED** 20 September 1984

BRABEN FAMOUSLY CELEBRATED the 10th anniversary of *Elite* by chasing Ian Bell for 12 miles in a hot air balloon, such has their friendship deteriorated since they created their seminal, space-age classic in September of 1984.

A series of sequels, for which Bell allegedly wasn't properly accredited, drove a wedge between the two men. But while together they achieved something very special. With *Elite*, they didn't just raise the bar, they grabbed the bar and threw it, javelin-like, into the stratosphere, where it speared an eagle and continued on, a frozen trophy floating through the cosmos.

THE FIRST OF MANY

Elite spawned not just a lasting genre, but it left behind a legacy of features and inspirations still felt today, from *EVE Online* to anything where you run back and forth selling things. There are so few games whose anniversaries we'd mark in such an utterly unironic way. We might look back at the quarter-century old *Manic Miner*, but hardly with admiration, more a self-effacing chuckle at how shit it was *Elite*, however, is honestly important.

I wasn't born to see it. I was whizzing about in a pre-birth void with all my other limbo-chums – nega-Lily Allen, the un-ghost of Lewis Hamilton, the nine kilojoules of potential energy that was Shia LaBeouf, all of who are younger than *Elite* (though it's likely only Lily Allen has played it) and have yet had the impact as this game.

That said, the inconvenience of non-existence didn't dull my enthusiasm for the series, and *Frontier: Elite II* is still

my stock response when asked what my favourite game is. *X-Wing* provided better combat, *EVE Online* genuinely captured the fantasy of space travel, and *X2* felt far more entrepreneurial – but *Frontier*, whether by virtue of being first, still stands firmly atop my list. And I'll fight anyone who says the Newtonian physics weren't brilliant.

Replaying the first game forces you to wonder exactly how much of what you were enjoying was conjured up in your imagination. A mess of sparse wireframe and colour which remains

Set: 1485.6 kmh⁻¹
Act: 1463.7 kmh⁻¹



THE ELITE SERIES

The highs and lows of the classic series



ELITE – 1984

The first in the series, and the one continually described as seminal. And you know what seminal means, don't you? That's right, *Elite* spunked its filthy load into the games industry, and 25 years later we're up to our eyeballs in its grandchildren. The game came in several guises, the best of which was arguably the Acorn Archimedes version, which saw AI ships going about their business in an entirely believable fashion. A truly living, breathing universe.



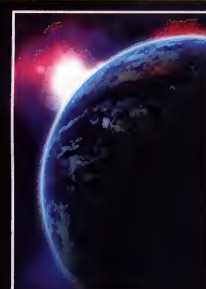
FRONTIER: ELITE II – 1993

Deconstructing *Frontier's* code showed that the algorithm that gave names to every planet in the galaxy could use "Bell" (as in "Bell's Legacy" and "Bell's Grave") but not "Braben". A fluke or proof Braben had a place in his heart for his friend. Either way, despite being derided for bugs and its innovative control system *Frontier* remains a favourite for many. Especially those too dim-witted to see past *Elite's* low-poly exterior.



FRONTIER: FIRST ENCOUNTERS – 1995

First Encounters felt soulless for reasons of which I'm not entirely sure. Perhaps it was because it was eerily similar to *Frontier*, but different in a way that was hard to nail down (beyond the obvious graphical update). It was like a stuffed, animatronic version of an elderly relative – for all intents and purposes identical, but their glassy stare and absolute stillness unsettled you to the point where you visit less than ever before.



ELITE 4 – TBC

Braben and his studio are currently all tied up with *The Outsider*. While this open-world techno-thriller looks interesting, it's distinctly not about spaceships. But Braben and co. have promised to get straight to work on *Elite 4* as soon as they can, but can it honestly live up to our unfairly high expectations? Of course it can. It'll likely be the most engaging and entertaining and piece of software ever crafted. Just like *Duke Nukem Forever* should have been.

First Encounters was innovative. Really.

Old Black Gateway 4

Hope



inexplicably charming, *Elite* began life as an incredibly basic space combat simulator, before Braben and Bell thought to add a galaxy map and the ability to trade, giving the blackness of space substance. To say the genre was born of an afterthought might be stressing things, but to a degree *Elite* was made up as Bell and Braben added features without much thought.

Bell went away once *Elite* shipped, while Braben continued to develop the series. He founded his studio,

Frontier Developments, and with Chris Sawyer developed the sequel *Frontier*. Having approved the use of several assets in exchange for royalties on *Frontier* profits, Bell also claimed that he was happy for Braben to continue creating add-ons and mission disks for the space sim.

Things turned sour when credit allegedly wasn't given for Bell's contributions, and when Braben allegedly began *First Encounters* – an alleged full sequel to *Frontier*. Bell felt (albeit allegedly) that he was being done out of royalties.

To put it lightly, he couldn't have been more displeased if Braben had shat on his porch, and when asked about the dispute in an interview published on Bell's homepage, he says – in what we can only imagine is a voice like being hit in the face with a tombstone, "The lesson I've learnt from this is that I'm a poor judge of character." And that's probably him being reserved. That, kids, is why the original *Elite* will never appear on the iPhone.

First Encounters ended up a bum note in the series that, while technically astounding, was rightly overlooked by players and history. The game generated 3D terrain on planets procedurally, allowing for an entire galaxy of fully explorable, 3D planets. This complexity was ultimately at the expense of stability, and alongside some horrendous attempts at fixing the unbroken

Tut. Those domes won't keep any air in them.



"With *Elite*, they didn't just raise the bar, they grabbed the bar and threw it into the stratosphere"

DID YOU KNOW?

Erroneous facts plucked from our Twitter feed...

» The original design for *Elite* was set on Earth and saw you selling fags at the local pubs around David Braben's home town. (@prezzer)

» No-one has ever successfully got past that first docking bit in *Elite*, so instead just pretend they've played it. (@thezombiecow)

» Braben based the Thargoid race on his close friend and neighbour Peter Thargoyd; a locally famous revolving/octagonal 3D mesh. (@batsphinx)

» *Elite* is so named for its original purpose – a 'diet' substitute for the class A drug ecstasy. 'E-Lite' comedowns are milder. (@richmcc)

» The whole *Elite* universe takes place in a mote in God's eye. Fly out far enough, turn round, and you can watch him wave to you. (@richardcobbett)

» David Braben based the manual docking sequence on his own clumsy attempts at losing his virginity. (@peregr1n)

» All the 'random' system names in *Elite* are actually underground sexual slang. Some, like Riedquat, are unspeakably dirty. (@trioptimum)

(among these the tragic decision to use ugly, stretched, low-colour bitmaps) it became far less playable than its forebears.

TRULY ELITE

Depressingly, there are fewer and fewer games like *Elite*. Not because of any shortcomings on the part of today's developers, but because of our withering capacity to be impressed by anything as we run towards the grave.

Looking out of the cockpit at the rising planet of Aster, gunrunning through Lave, scooping hydrogen fuel from the outer atmosphere of Arcturus, forgetting to install life support before transporting a tonne of slaves, and then selling the resulting corpses to a meat vendor – it might sound like a *Blade Runner* soliloquy, but they're some of PC gaming's best and most fleeting moments.

Will we see any like it again in the next 25 years? Of course we will.

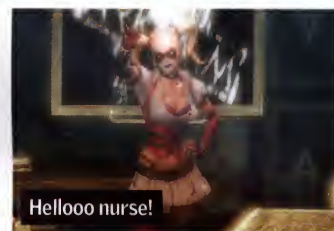
They'll just have more pixels in. **PCZ**

On the PCZ Hard Drive

The games we're playing, and why we're playing them



Batman violently interrupts the convicts' ballet practice.



Hellooo nurse!



"You'll live. Just."

BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM

Wearing tights: **Steve Hogarty**

BATMAN'S NOT SUPPOSED to kill people, but things I've done in *Batman: Arkham Asylum* come close. Batman hits people. He hits people really, really hard.

There are thugs who might now wish they were dead, as they sit, traumatised in some grotty hospital ward while an unsympathetic nurse thrusts spoonfuls of lumpy semolina down their gob.

Once, in the Records Room, Batman leapt high into the air towards a stunned goon who was standing with his back to a banister. On his way down he let fly a

devastatingly powerful punch, cracking once as it connected with the man's skull, and once again as his head made contact with the ornamental railing. His head was pinned between an immovable object and the locomotive fist of a highly skilled martial artist.

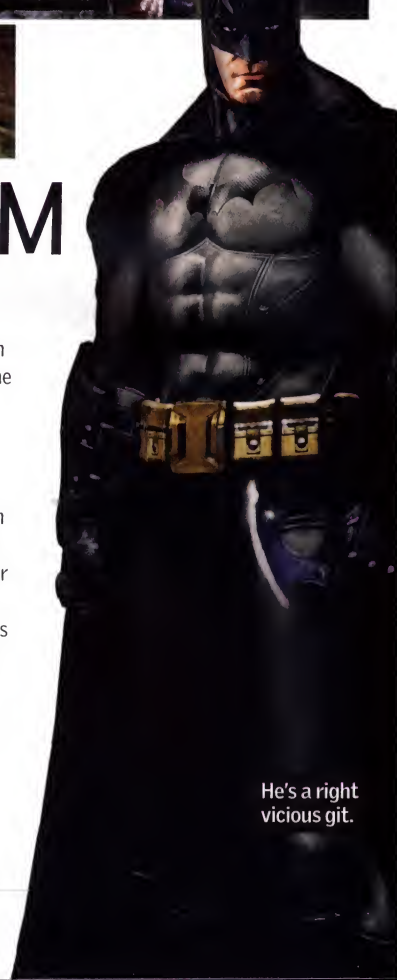
If it'd been any other game, his cranium would pop open like a squeezed grape, his eyes pinging about the room like ping pong balls. In *Arkham Asylum* though, enemies fall unconscious, asleep, dreaming about being beaten up by a man dressed as a bat. That makes

Arkham Asylum safe. It is violent, but in the same way that spearing a man in the chest in *Mini Ninjas* turns him into a bouncing fox, Batman's non-lethal takedowns are wholesome.

That, or Bruce Wayne is deluded. He's programmed his detective-o-vision to detect fictional pulses in the corpses of the men he's beaten to death, in order to shield himself from the awful truth: that he's a murderer just as psychotic as the villains he seeks to imprison. Watch one of *Arkham Asylum's* unconscious bodies for half an hour – they're not going anywhere. At the least they're in comas. Batman is putting people in comas. Christ, Batman. Stop it!

VERDICT: Brutal

"A murderer just as psychotic as the villains he seeks to imprison"



He's a right vicious git.

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS ONLINE: EBERRON UNLIMITED

Chasing Kobolds: **Richard Cosgrove**

LIKE A CRACK dealer attempting back a recovering addict, Turbine's offer of seven day's worth of playing *D&D Online* appeared in my inbox a few weeks ago. But what's the point of that? The game is free anyway. Well, the clincher was it would be my old account.

That stopped me in my tracks. I just stared at my computer screen. That's how I usually spend my time, but this email caused me to stare at the screen in a completely unconstructive manner.

You see *D&D Online* is my kind of MMO. It's the only MMO I've ever enjoyed playing. It was a proper role-playing game, set in a proper world, with proper characters. Well, nearly. Turbine completely shafted the proper *D&D* levelling system, but the game still held up well.

Played solo it was *Neverwinter Nights*. Played as a team, it showed up *World of Warcraft* as being the mindless repetitive clicking it really is.

But then I remembered two of the reasons why I stopped playing: cash and kobolds.

The first problem is solved – by *DDO* being free-to-play. I don't have to use cash money unless I really want to get cool armor, ultra-sneaky boots, or other stuff people with cash can do.

But then there's the kobolds who infest every starting dungeon. These stupid, yapping lizard-goblins have mages who never run out of spells. Those bastards were so irritating I refused to give Turbine my money so I could keep fighting them. But maybe things will be different this time round.

VERDICT: MMO King

"D&D Online is my kind of MMO. It's the only MMO I've ever enjoyed"



WOLFENSTEIN

Nazi killer: **Chris Capel**

YES, I KNOW, I should've listened to the review. But honestly, a Raven/id Software game continuing the granddaddy series of the FPS genre? How bad could it be? Bad.

Right from the start I'd a feeling I wasn't going to like *Wolfenstein*, and that feeling never went away. I don't know if it's the hideously ill-placed checkpoints or the invulnerability BJ Blazkowicz has to common soldiers that set me off.

In the first few hours of the game on Hard I died more from stupid design than at the hands of the Nazis.

For good points I can say that the Veil, the shroud of green superpowers that gets pulled over the world, is nicely implemented. And despite being either extremely aggravated or not challenged at all for most of my time in the game, I still vaguely got some pleasure out of playing the game (not to over-egg my enthusiasm).



However, now that I've finished it I can't honestly think of a single reason to go back other than the fact that I paid money for it and can't return it. I certainly won't be playing it for the multiplayer anyway. Not only is it

a cheaply cobbled together mess, it also insists that you use an Xbox pad.

I'll stick with every other much-better game that I'm currently playing right now thanks.

VERDICT: Don't cry Wolf, cry COD

WHAT'S ON YOUR HARD DRIVE?

Readers on their chosen poison

CALL OF JUAREZ

Just got the first *Call of Juarez* for £4. Apart from some ropery voice acting I'm liking it! Revd Ray is a fantastic character! All I need now is *Outlaws* to be re-released by Lucasfarts.

Alberthammond

STRANGEHOLD

After completing *F.E.A.R. 2* and *Reborn* I fancied some more slow-mo action. *Stranglehold* has been waiting its turn long enough and got to say I really enjoyed it. Old one but a good 'un for sure.

King clueless

RESIDENT EVIL 5

Resi Evil 5 has absorbed some 40 hours of my gaming time, I'm sorry but I love this game, it's beautiful to look at and somewhat awesome in its execution. Besides, the breast physics are awesome.

Mad AI

TIME GENTLEMEN, PLEASE!

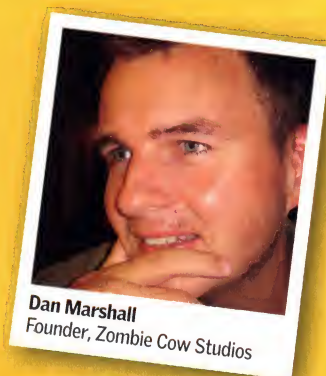
Steve Hogarty learns to love low-resolution comedy

ADVENTURE GAMES ARE making a comeback! There they are over there! Look at them now, coming back.

The award-winning *Time Gentlemen, Please!* is among this returning charge of point of clicks, a hugely funny, cleverly written and shockingly irreverent (a man gets shot in the cock) game from Zombie Cow Studios, the guys who brought us *Ben There, Dan That!* and the PC ZONE-grown

platformer *Gibbage*. This is perhaps the funniest adventure game we've encountered since *Gobliins 4*, and is certainly the worst animated.

So with this in mind (and episodic Dan and Ben adventures just around the corner) we questioned the Dan-shaped half of the adventuring duo about the freedom of being indie and accidentally offending people. Here's the sort of thing he said...



01 COULDN'T BE FÜHRER FROM THE TRUTH

"As release approached I have to admit I suddenly got very scared about Hitler. Not like he's going to come back and 'get' me or anything, but are you allowed to take the piss out of Hitler like this? I assume so, because pretty much every comedy seems to have done it, but I'm not 100% sure. Fortunately, ours is an alternate-history Hitler, so it's probably alright as far as the police are concerned. Besides, if anyone's ripe for lampooning, it's old Hitler, surely?"



02 COMBO MEAL

"It can be a little bit upsetting to think of how much of the script some people might miss. There's some brilliant jokes should you happen to keep hold of an item and take it right back to the start of the game and use it somewhere improbable. Often, though, if I wrote something genuinely funny for a really obscure interaction, I'd just try to shift it somewhere it's more likely to play out – but where there's context to the action, depending on what you're doing to someone with whichever inventory item, it has to go in no matter how few people played it.

"At one point, I was going to put in a mock achievements system, for trying out madcap stuff as a way of encouraging people to stop and explore a little more. In a game like *Time Gentlemen, Please!* it was too unwieldy, but it's definitely something I'd like to go back to, maybe in future episodes."

03 DAN ABNORMAL

"The only real reason the 'Use Dan' action wasn't very prominent in *Ben There, Dan That!* is because we forgot about it. When we got to the end of the design process and started writing the script, we realised that you only ever have to use Dan twice in the whole thing. It all turned out for the best, because we wound up making a big feature of it – Ben not really trusting Dan to help out, that sort of thing, which is actually some of the funniest and sweetest dialogue in the whole game.

"We couldn't just recycle all that for TGP, though. It'd just seem lazy at best. You've got to be clever and do different things in sequels... so we put the Use Dan mechanic wherever it didn't feel completely arbitrary, and tied it into his personality more as the computer-savvy one."



"You've got to be clever and do different things in sequels"



04 MAKING THE CUT

"One of the awesome things about being an indie is you don't have to worry about cutting stuff because it's too offensive or it won't sate market penetration projections, or any of that nonsense, so there's actually very little that got cut for any proper, grown-up reasons.

"One of my prime reasons for cutting things is if it'd take too long in terms of assets. Originally the ending was going to involve a time machine built into a tandem, but bikes are difficult to draw. So

we instead re-used a pre-existing asset. Not only did that make more sense, but it felt more rounded because a bicycle hadn't just turned up out of nowhere.

"When you're making games on a budget, you have to be constantly re-inventing things to suit, and by-and-large it's a really useful process because the boiled-down version of what you're left with is a much stronger, more refined and altogether tastier sauce... sorry I've gone into a cooking metaphor."



Eye patch = double evil.

Another puzzle, utterly solved.

05 CONTROVERSY

"There was a guy who reviewed *Ben There, Dan That!* and got all uppity about how this bit where you 'mock and kill a disabled guy' was 'too much'. I didn't remember making that bit. It turned out he was referring to this puzzle where you accidentally kill a geeky T-Rex who's pretending to be disabled (with his little forearms) to get out of doing any work, but the way he wrote it up it sounded like there's a guy in a wheelchair you have to dance around before bludgeoning with a spanner, or something.

"Anyway, so there was going to be a character based around this guy, who assumed everything you said was some sort of attack at his plethora of imaginary disabilities. But we decided if you're the sort of person who takes offence at a cartoon dinosaur having short forearms, you're probably the sort of person who'd sue if you found yourself being mocked in a game."



Take that, all disabled people everywhere!



06 WHY GO EPISODIC?

"There's a load of code written for TGP that it'd be a waste to not re-use – all that loading and saving bollocks that took me about three days to get working – and there's loads of core stuff ready to be churned out again and again ad-infinity until you're really sick of Dan and Ben and their stupid smug faces and crappy animations.

"So once the engine's finished, making new games with new puzzles and dialogues and stories is the easy bit – especially if they're episodic and as such the number of inventory items and locations is more controlled."

The terrifying future of point-and-clicks.

08 GUIDED BY VOICES

"Voices cost money, and we don't have any. Also, with the amount of dialogue in the Dan and Ben games, where everything has a reaction, the file sizes would wind up being preposterous if everything were voiced.

"I did consider the possibility of getting friends in to voice it, but it'd just wind up feeling really amateurish and stunted. Guybrush was better without a voice, and I think giving voices to Dan and Ben's a similar sort of deal – how they sound in your head when playing is better than how they'd sound if we'd conned a friend into recording thousands of lines of dialogue for us.

"Originally, we were going to get Jon 'Log' Blyth in to record God's lines in the end sequence. We thought it'd be funny to have it turn into a talkie for one character. What's more, being omnipotent, you'd think God would have a voice. And naturally you'd also assume he'd have Log's purring, dulcet tones.

"It's one of those ideas that sounds great in theory, but just doesn't work in practice. You just miss what he's saying because you're thinking 'What? Why is this game suddenly a talkie?'"



The saga begins...

07 INDIE DREAM

"Being an indie's more of a worry than anything else. There's money around, but it's not much and you know it's going to run out eventually. Whether *Zombie Cow* will still be here in a year's time is a big question, and that's a pretty horrifying thing to have to get up to every morning.

"Promoting a game's half the work. Nothing lands on your lap and you've got to be prepared to work at promoting it like it's a full-time job. Fortunately, *PC ZONE*'s lovely Will Porter helped me out here, pointing me in the right direction and suggesting the right people to pester. He's a lovely lad, I owe him an awful lot of beer should I ever finally make some money.

"That said, I work from home. I don't have to get a stinking, overpriced train into central London with a billion other idiots anymore. My quality of life has shot up immeasurably, even if my ability to buy trinkets and what-nots has dropped rather dramatically. I love it."



Hitler's mech, available in any colour as long as it's sepia.

STEVE HILL'S

NEVERQUEST

Steve Hill makes an heroic return in *Champions Online*



LOOK WHO'S BACK. Where have I been? Nowhere. Having retired from the wonderful and frightening world of the absurdly abbreviated MMORPGs over a year ago, I've been mainly playing online poker as my micro-celebrity alter ego HillyTheFish (look it up). I'm kind of a big deal. Almost every day, a lol-er will ask "Are you da real HillyTheFish?" If I say yes, they call me a liar. If I say no, they don't believe me.

PC ZONE readers are a more trusting bunch. I've barely registered the name NeverQuest Hill and entered *Champions Online* when a burly robot called Exp-257 sidles up to me and exclaims, "You're not THE *NeverQuest* guy are you?"

JOY OF SYCOPHANCY

It's almost enough to warm my dead heart, and in a rare use of an exclamation mark, I joyfully reply, "Yes. It's back!"

Exp-257 is even more excited than me, and tests the game's swear filter to the max by barking, "Oh &*@% I love your articles."

And if you haven't got the faintest idea what I'm on about, said articles involved me stepping into the MMO du jour like a latter-day Mr Benn and having unspeakable adventures with the natives. Running for a sizeable chunk of this

magazine's history, they were hidden between the hardware and the classified ads, from where I assume my modified face is currently staring back at you, a chilling reminder of a life in decline. And if anyone asks, they had to beg me...

So, to *Champions Online*, which offers a near infinite choice of character creation options. Overwhelmed, I press the randomise button and arrive looking like the bloke from *Assassin's Creed* has put on weight, mixed up his colours and his whites, and had a pipe of Pringles embedded into his chest.

Armed with some puny weapons, I do my best to fend off an alien invasion, before being taken under the metallic wing of my new best friend, Exp-257. Like a gentle lover, he leads me by the hand, letting me take the initiative when appropriate, and stepping in to help without ever embarrassing me. Together we vanquish the Black Talon, and he graciously allows me to carry out the money shot of launching Ironclad.

Whatever the Ironclad does, it seems to carry some significance, as we are greeted as heroes by a full military parade. Having earned our wings, we are rewarded with a choice of being taken to an irradiated desert or the frozen wastes of Canada. Stuck between a rock and a cold place, under Exp-257's advice we



"Falling in with a pushy twat called Jigsaw, I head into a cave"

head for the latter. We go to a shop, where I buy the ability to fly. Excitedly, I tell Exp-257, and he confirms, "Yes you can, Mr Downey Jr," which I take to be some kind of popular culture reference.

ONWARDS, TO BED...

"Ready to kill stuff?" asks my robot buddy, before he steams into some Ice Demons, who mercilessly slaughter him.

"I should go to bed," he announces, not particularly heroically. "Good luck with *NeverQuest*, my Hill." All the same, he fucks off and leaves me cold and alone with little more than a pair of shorts and a Rejuvenating Minimalizer.

Fancying a change of scene, I relocate to the desert to kill mutants. Falling in with a pushy twat called Jigsaw, I head into a cave where he barks orders as if

I'm working for him. Somehow we manage to vanquish the tenacious Gigaton, causing the cave's collapse.

I make it out alive, with little concern for the uptight Jigsaw. Looking for new friends, I overhear a discussion about the correct name of a spaceship's windshield.

"It's a view port," insists a winged being called Isuzu.

"I have to clean it like a windshield," retorts Onidega, swishing her glowing green tail.

Biding my time, I introduce myself. They reject my overtures of friendship. One of them dances at me, mocking my solitude. Biting back tears, I head into the Atomic Wasteland where I kill cowboy ghosts with an angelic creature called Seraphim.

"Nice wings by the way," I flirt.

"Thanks, I like them a lot!" she replies. "Well that's it for me, I'm off to bed."

Maybe it's the pointy ears, maybe it's the shorts, but this trip hasn't been an unqualified success. Heading to a nearby shop, I find that I can't get out.

"Yeah, it happens sometimes," explains a bull in camouflaged trousers.

Two superheroes, throwing themselves at a door... **PCZ**



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King of Letters

Winning an ASUS 9600GT Silent

and an ASUS 900GT Silent.

212: Sean Mears, Norfolk

213: Alex King, Kent

PCZ Around The World

Winning a mystery prize!

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THE BUMPER STICKER QUIZ

Can you guess which famous gaming characters own these bumper stickers? Answers at the bottom of the page.



ANSWERS: 1. Commander Shepard (Mass Effect) 2. Niko Bellic (GTA-4) 3. Andrew Ryan (BioShock) 4. Little Sister (BioShock) 5. Point Man (F.E.A.R.) 6. Carla Valentini (Fahrenheit) 7. Medic and Heavy (Team Fortress 2) 8. Max Payne (Max Payne) 9. Gerald of Rivia (The Witcher) 10. Lara Croft (Tomb Raider) 11. Sam Fisher (Splinter Cell) 12. Gordon Freeman (Half-Life 2)

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